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# BRAZIL IN THE POETRY OF ELIZABETH BISHOP: A "DAZZLING DIALECTIC"

por

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For Maria Tereza, Luciano and Nicole,

"Um abraço de gaivota..."

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## ABSTRACT

The presence of Brazil in the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop extends along a period of almost three decades, from the early 1950s with "Arrival at Santos," up to the late 1970s with "Pink Dog" and "Santarém," published shortly before the poet's death in 1979. Considering the significant space that Brazil occupies in Bishop's poetry and the intimate connection between her poetry and her own experience in this country, this research investigates the development of Bishop's perception of Brazil through the changes in the personae's views expressed along the course of the relevant poems. Four main moments are identified in this process: the poet's first impressions of Brazil as a "tourist" and a "traveler"; the process of immersion into the Brazilian context from the perception of to the identification with "the other"; the conflict with the familiar; and the poetic reconstruction of what "has been lost." Changes and accomplishments of Bishop's poetry from this period will also be focused during the process of analysis to the extent that these bear upon her perceptions of Brazil as expressed in the poetry. Finally, this dissertation concludes that Bishop's depiction of Brazil through her poems does not reveal a partial, stereotyped view of the country, commonly found among conventional foreign tourists or "outside observers." Conversely, her poems convey a much richer perspective, resultant from the "dazzling dialectic" of her own experience in living the two cultures, her own and the one she met in Brazil.

# RESUMO

A presença do Brasil na poesia de Elizabeth Bishop estende-se por um período de quase três décadas, do início dos anos 50 com "Arrival at Santos", até o final dos anos 70 com "Pink Dog" e "Santarém", publicados pouco antes da morte da poetisa em 1979. Considerando-se o significativo espaço que o Brasil ocupa na poesia de Bishop e a íntima relação entre a sua poesia e a sua própria experiência no país, essa pequisa investiga o desenvolvimento da sua percepção de Brasil através de mudanças nas perspectivas das "personae", expressas ao longo do curso dos respectivos poemas. Quatro principais momentos são identificados nesse processo: as primeiras impressões de Brasil da poetisa como "turista" e "viajante"; o processo de imersão no contexto brasileiro, da percepção à identificação com "o outro"; o conflito com o familiar; e a reconstrução poética do que "se perdeu". Mudanças e conquistas da poesia de Bishop desse período serão também focalizadas durante o processo de análise à medida em que estiverem relacionadas com sua percepção de Brasil, expressa na sua poesia. Finalmente, essa dissertação conclui que, ao retratar o Brasil em seus poemas, Bishop não revela uma visão parcial e estereotipada do país, comumente encontrada entre turistas estrangeiros ou "observadores externos". Ao contrário, seus poemas demonstram uma perspectiva bem mais rica, resultante da sua experiência de viver a "dazzling dialectic" das duas culturas, a sua e a que encontrou no Brasil.

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# CHAPTER I

# INTRODUCTION

Two places are considered of particular importance in the course of Elizabeth Bishop's life as a poet: Nova Scotia and Brazil. The former, where she lived from the age of three to the age of six and visited several times in her adult life, was the setting for some of her best poems like "Cape Breton" and "At the Fishhouses." The latter, where she spent her middle age from the early 1950s up to the beginning of the 1970s, yielded Questions of Travel and influenced a great deal the poetry she produced after this period.

Bishop's decision to make a round-the-world journey in late November, 1951, which resulted in her long stay in Brazil, happens in a crucial moment in her life marked by years of solitude. In a letter to Robert Lowell, few years before her trip, Bishop refers to solitude as already part of her life:

> I think you said a while ago that I'd "laugh you to scorn" on some conversation you & J. had had about how to protest oneself against solitude & ennui--but indeed I wouldn't. That's just the kind of "suffering" I'm most at home with & helpless about, I'm afraid, but what with 2 days of fog and alarming low tides I've really got it bad & think I'll write you a note before I go out & eat some mackerel.[1]

Months later, in another letter to Lowell, Bishop again refers to her loneliness as something "cyclical"and to the dullness of her

routine:

> The "loneliness" is pretty bad here, too--in fact I'm sure in some ways it's much more boring than Yaddo. No one interesting has turned up here for years and my dear friends (4) and I when we get together just are apt to sit around and discuss the fact. But there is swimming and fishing and when I feel too awful I take a long bicycle ride. You know what--my "loneliness" comes in attacks--rather brief--sometimes 2 or 3 a day, and then I don't have any for a week.[2]

Long bicycle rides do not seem to solve the problem for too long. The idea of a trip comes as a promise of change, a "shakedown," as Bishop herself defines it, in a journal already on board the Norwegian freighter that would bring her to Brazil.

With no particular interest in Brazil, Bishop arrives at the Santos harbor with plans to go to Rio de Janeiro for a short visit. Bishop had some Brazilian friends in Rio, people she had previously met in New York, among them Maria Carlota Costellat de Macedo Soares, Lota. Once in Rio, Bishop has a violent allergic reaction to the fruit of the cashew and ends up staying at Lota's apartment in Copacabana. In a very short time, Lota, the occasional friend, becomes her hostess and nurse, and, eventually, her companion for almost two decades.

During her stay in Brazil, Bishop shares with Lota the apartment in Copacabana and a house in Petrópolis--Samambaia--, both respectively immortalized in the poems: "Apartment in Copacabana," or "Apartment in Leme" (unpublished), and "Song for the Rainy Season." Besides these two residences, Bishop also keeps for several years a seventeenth-century house that she buys and restores in Ouro Preto--Casa Mariana--, in honor of Marianne Moore.

From the "window" of Casa Mariana, Bishop draws the ordinary scenes and characters for the poem "Under the Window: Ouro Preto."

In 1958, Bishop takes part on an expedition to Mato Grosso and Brasília with Aldous Huxley, an experience that she reports years later in the book Brazil, edited by Time & Life. In the 1960s, two other trips also bring about important accounts: a trip down the Amazon in 1961, which appears later in the nostalgic re-creation of "Santarém," and a trip on an old stern-wheeler on the Rio São Francisco, narrated in an unpublished essay entitled "A Trip on the Rio São Francisco."

As Lorrie Goldensohn declares, "Throughout this period, from 1951 to 1979, Brazilian places, houses, and people made their way into Bishop's work, pouring vividly into her poems, prose, letters, and translations" ("In the Footsteps of Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil" 23). It is worth mentioning here that a significant part of this material, still unpublished and rich in information about Brazil, is available only to a privileged minority who has access to Bishop's special collections held by Universities abroad.

Although "Arrival at Santos," Bishop's first poem about Brazil, comes out in 1952, therefore, soon after her arrival in the country, and other poems about Brazil are published along the course of the 1950s and 1960s, these poems only appear in a single volume in 1965, fourteen years after she had arrived in the country. Gathering twelve poems about Brazil, Questions of Travel is the outcome of the poet's careful observation of the Brazilian reality, from her first impressions as a newly arrived tourist registered in "Arrival at Santos" up to her symbolic identification with "the other" in "The Riverman." One could argue that to follow

the course of Bishop's poetry in Questions of Travel is to follow the process of her own perception of Brazil. Lloyd Schwartz observes in this respect that,

> In no other volume did [Bishop] arrange her poems so consistently out of the order in which she actually wrote them, and together they compose an emotional chronology from the perspective of the fourteen years she had then spent in Brazil. ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 91)

If it is possible to observe the development of Bishop's perception of Brazil through the changes in the personae's views expressed along this "emotional chronology" of the poems in Questions of Travel, it is also worth investigating the continuation of this process in poems published afterwards, written while she is still in Brazil and after she goes back to the United States.

In the mid-1960s, Bishop publishes four more poems about Brazil--"Rainy Season, Sub-Tropics," "Under the Window: Ouro Preto," "Going to the Bakery," and "House Guest"--the last poems before her definitive move back to America. Two years before her last trip to Brazil (1972), Bishop edits with Emanuel Brasil An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Brazilian Poetry, including her translations of Carlos Drummond de Andrade, Vinícius de Moraes, and João Cabral de Mello Neto. According to Schwartz, this publication was "an expression of [Bishop's] gratitude to Brazil for the literary life she could pursue [here], and her official farewell" ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 95). For some critics, the absence of any direct reference to Brazil in Geography III, published in 1967, confirms this farewell, marking the definitive rupture of the bonds between Bishop's poetry and Brazil. This assumption,

nevertheless, is questionable, as I shall demonstrate in the final chapter of this dissertation.

After its alleged absence in Geography III, Brazil "reappears" as the theme of two poems with very distinct features: "Santarém" and "Pink Dog." Published in the late 1970s, short before Bishop's death, these two poems register her last impressions of Brazil. Considering the time in which the first and the last poem about Brazil were published, it is possible to say that Brazil has been significantly present in Bishop's poetry for almost three decades.

The purpose of this research is to trace the development of Bishop's perception of Brazil along the course of these almost three decades of poetry. As Schwartz observes in regard to Questions of Travel, the order in which the poems are disposed does not correspond to their actual composition chronology, but, rather, to an "emotional chronology," from the perspective of the time Bishop has lived in Brazil. Considering, therefore, not the actual chronology of composition, but observing the changes in the personae's views along the course of the poems as ordered in Questions of Travel, I will attempt to identify and assess such changes. The same procedure will be applied to the poems about Brazil published afterwards.

Based on the assumptions that the almost twenty years Bishop spent here had a significant influence on her own perception of Brazil, and that the poems she wrote at the time (and later) register this experience, I will attempt to demonstrate that the process of change in the persona's view reflects the development of the poet's perception of Brazil.

In order to achieve such purpose I will proceed with an in-depth analysis of the content of the relevant poems, resorting to scholarship whenever it can enrich or clarify the analysis in question. I shall also make references to Bishop's prose and non-fiction work--comments, letters, notes--as well as to her unpublished poetry and prose, to the extent that these pertain to the analysis.

The criteria for grouping the poems in a chapter or in a section inside a chapter were determined either by similarities of themes or by similarities of perspectives. The poems were, thus, gathered in four major units following the path covered by almost three decades of poetry, from the first to the last accounts of Brazil.

In the first chapter, I will start by analysing the three opening poems of Questions of Travel, in which the poet overtly identifies herself as a "tourist" and a "traveler," still an outside observer paradoxically frustrated with and fascinated by the first images of Brazil.

In the next chapter, the largest in number of poems to be analysed, I will investigate the development of the poet's perception as she merges into the Brazilian reality. This process of immersion goes from the perception of "the other," in "Squatter's Children" and "Manuelzinho," the first Brazilian human types focused in Bishop's poetry, to the symbolic identification with "the other" in the persona of "The Riverman." Two other issues will be brought to analysis in this chapter: the sense of "home" and the responses to social and political problems involving Brazil at the time. These two spheres correspond to the levels in which

the poet relates herself to the small world, represented by the domain of "home," and to the outer world.

In the third chapter my study will be concentrated in the group of poems from the late 1960s, published between Questions of Travel and Geography III. These poems are the last ones about Brazil published while Bishop was still living in the country and reflect moments of conflict dramatically unveiled in the voice of the strange creatures of "Rainy-Season; Sub-Tropics."

Finally, I will conclude my analysis with the poem "Santarém," a nostalgic narration of a trip down the Amazon, reconstructed years after Bishop had left Brazil. Beside "Pink Dog," this is literally the last register of Brazil in Bishop's poetry. In this final chapter I will also investigate the alleged absence of Brazil in Geography III.

# NOTES

[1] Elizabeth Bishop, unpublished letter to Robert Lowell, 8 September 1948, Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Folder 3.

[2] Elizabeth Bishop, unpublished letter to Robert Lowell, 11 January 1949, Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Folder 4.

# CHARTER II

## A FOREIGNER IN THE "STRANGEST OF THEATRES"

The first three poems of Questions of Travel--"Arrival at Santos," "Brazil, January 1, 1502," and "Questions of Travel"--constitute a significant segment in the process of Elizabeth Bishop's insight into the Brazilian reality. The first, deliberately superficial and ironic, depicts the immediate reactions of a newly arrived tourist disappointed at the first images of Brazil. In the second, "the tourist" gives way to "the traveler" and the observer, in ecstasy at the exuberance of nature and showing the first nuances of historical and political awareness. Rather than mere "questions of travel," the third poem is a question of reflecting on the very validity of this travel. Although it was originally published four years before "Brazil, January 1, 1502," its final placement in the first edition of Questions of Travel must have been determined by what Lloyd Schwartz identifies as "an emotional chronology" ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 91). In "Questions of Travel," rather than concentrating only on the landscape, the traveler's eyes register a mosaic of images right along the road. It is as if, after being intoxicated by the exotic beauty of nature, the poet starts to perceive a more casual Brazil.

"Arrival at Santos," Bishop's first poetic account of Brazil, comes out a year after her arrival. It starts in a tone of dissatisfaction, showing the oppositon between the poet's expectation and the reality found:

> Here is a coast; here is a harbor;
> here, after a meager diet of horizon, is some scenery:
> impractically shaped and--who knows?--self-pitying
> mountains,
> sad and harsh beneath their frivolous greenery,
>
> with a little church on top of one. And warehouses,
> some of them painted a feeble pink, or blue,
> and some tall, uncertain palms. Oh, tourist,
> is this how this country is going to answer you
>
> and your immodest demands for a different world,
> and a better life, and complete comprehension
> of both at last, and immediately,
> after eighteen days of suspension?[1] (89)

The tourist who was in search of "a different world, / and a better life, and complete comprehension / of both at last, and immediately," gets frustrated at the flatness of the landscape and transfers to it the tone of her own mood. According to Lorrie Goldensohn, the use of landscape "as the outward semblance of the self, as the mirroring or external correlative of the self's condition" (Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry 8). becomes "nearly automatic" in Bishop's poetry, mainly from the Brazilian poems on. The gesture of pointing to "the coast," "the harbor," and "some scenery" is in fact the movement of the poet's eyes observing a passive scenery indifferent to her expectations. The considerable number of adjectives that follows--"meager," "impractically shaped," "self-pitying," "sad and harsh," "frivolous," "feeble," "tall," "uncertain"--compressed in the first two stanzas reinforces the projection of the poet's self into the

landscape through its personification. The poet's expectations had demanded an immediacy that the landscape was not able to fullfil.

Suddenly breaking the nostalgic tone of her wonderings, the poet shifts the focus of her attention to the here and now:

> Finish your breakfast. The tender is coming,
> a strange and ancient craft, flying a strange and
> brilliant rag.
> So that's the flag. I never saw it before.
> I somehow never thought of there being a flag,
>
> but of course there was, all along. And coins, I presume,
> and paper money; they remain to be seen. (89)

The description of the first signs of movement at the harbor--"a strange and ancient craft, flying a strange and brilliant rag"--still resonates the poet's impressions. Whatever is not part of an insipid and static landscape is "ancient" and "strange." The only "brilliant" element, "the rag," becomes the object of the tourist's inevitable mockery "So, that's the flag..." More practical things "remain to be seen."

In the next lines the poem gains a new pace as if, after a brief stop, life had returned to its ordinary course:

> And gingerly now we climb down the ladder backward,
> myself and a fellow passenger named Miss Breen,
>
> descending into the midst of twenty-six freighters
> waiting to be loaded with green coffee beans.
> Please, boy, do be more careful with that boat hook!
> Watch out! Oh! It has caught Miss Breen's
>
> skirt! There! Miss Breen is about seventy,
> a retired police lieutenant, six feet tall,
> with beautiful bright blue eyes and a kind expression.
> Her home, when she is at home, is in Glens Fall
>
> s,New York. There. We are settled.
> The customs officials will speak English, we hope,
> and leave us our bourbon and cigarettes. (89-90)

It is not accidental that the reference to Miss Breen is the only positive one in the whole poem. Miss Breen corresponds to the presence of the familiar or the domestic. Helen Vendler believes that the domestic "becomes a compulsion that we take with us even to the most unpromising locations, where we busy ourselves establishing domestic tranquility..." (24). Besides sharing the same language, "the bourbon and cigarettes," the two companions have something else in common: as habitual travelers, they both live in a sort of permanent exile. Miss Breen's home, "when she is at home, is in Glens Falls." Between the introduction of Miss Breen and her description, the poet inserts the direct imperatives--"Please, boy, do be more careful with that boat hook! / Watch out!..."--not only to express concern about the carriers' carelessness but also to emphazise the immediacy of the scene. "Ports are necessities, like postage stamps, or soap," says the poet already used to the transitional atmosphere and discomfort of these places which "seldom seem to care what impression they make." Bonnie Costello explains that "The traveler must accept the constant slippage of reality, the sense of each "arrival" marking a point of departure toward an elusive destination" (141). The idea of "slipping" or "wasting away" is here materialized in "the unassertive colors of soap, or postage stamps:"

> Ports are necessities, like postage stamps, or soap,
>
> but they seldom seem to care what impression they make,
>
> or, like this, only attempt, since it does not matter,
> the unassertive colors of soap, or postage stamps--
> wasting away like the former, slipping the way the latter
>
> do when we mail the letters we wrote on the boat,

> either because the glue here is very inferior
> or because of the heat. We leave Santos at once;
> we are driving to the interior. (90)

The reasons for postage stamps "slipping" due to cheap glue or letters never getting to their destination are ironically evasive and typical of a colonialist view, showing the first symptoms of the inevitable comparisons. In fact, from the very beginning of the poem, the idea of comparison is implied. The landscape that the two American travelers find here does not fit the primitive model that they probably had in mind. For Costello, what they find instead are "signs of an alternative culture to their own" (141). The impact of this "alternative culture" or the first images of an unexpected Brazil on preconceived ideas or expectations is what sets the tone of dissatisfaction pervading the poem. Remarks such as "a rag," that is in fact "the flag", "the inferior glue", and "leave us our bourbon and cigarettes" are also evidences of contrasts between the two cultures. The lines that separate these two cultures are here clearly defined by what is "our" and, therefore, familiar, and what is "strange." At the end of the poem, the poet again shifts the focus of the narrative to more immediate facts. As David Kalstone observes, "something more than geographical" is implied in the lines: "We leave Santos at once; / we are driving to the interior" (19).

Several years after the publication of "Arrival at Santos," Bishop writes in an introductory note for Black Beans and Diamonds, the book about Brazil she has never published:

> I arrived in Brazil in late November, 1951. I came on a Norwegian freighter, 14 days out of Brooklyn, and reached Santos late one night. The

> captain had told me that I would smell coffee twenty miles out at sea, and he was right; we smelled it all the afternoon before we entered the harbor. There were twenty six freighters waiting there to be loaded with coffee beans. The whole of that first night I sat up on the top deck watching the motions of the freighters, the play of lights, sweeping search-lights, ships' lights going to and fro, large and small craft of all sorts. It was a kind of water-ballet mysterious and beautiful, because nothing could be made out distinctly. In the morning light I was surprised by the comparative meanness and simplicity of the scene that had appeared so wild and strange at midnight.[2]

While the poem gives us a daylight account, the later note registers an arrival at night. "Eighteen days of suspension" correspond here to "14 days out of Brooklyn." On the other hand, there were indeed "twenty-six freighters [there] waiting to be loaded with [green] coffee beans" and this is a typical example of Bishop's concern with accuracy and details. If "Arrival at Santos" had been written "at nightlight", the first impressions of Brazil would definitely have been different. The images of the freighters being loaded and "the play of lights" at the harbor would be a scenery much closer to the poet's "immodest demands for a different world." Maybe because "nothing could be made out distinctly," the poet has preferred the reality of the scene of the next day. Nevertheless, this "water-ballet mysterious and beautiful" has remained alive in the poet's mind for sixteen or seventeen years until getting some space in a small note held today among other unpublished papers at the Vassar College Library.

If the meanness and simplicity of the landscape in "Arrival at Santos" has caused disappointment, the tropical exuberance of nature in "Brazil, January 1,1502" is celebrated in grand style. Landscape is seen as a tapestry in which the disposition of

different nuances, textures and forms follows the immediacy of the poet's visual perception:

> Januaries, Nature greets our eyes
> exactly as she must have greeted theirs:
> every square inch filling in with foliage--
> big leaves, little leaves, and giant leaves,
> blue, blue-green, and olive,
> with occasional lighter veins and edges,
> or a satin underleaf turned over;
> monster ferns
> in silver-gray relief,
> and flowers, too, like giant water lilies
> up in the air--up, rather, in the leaves--
> purple, yellow, two yellows, pink,
> rust red and greenish white;
> solid but airy; fresh as if just finished
> and taken off the frame. (91)

Intoxicated by the beauty of Nature, the Poet has difficulty in conciliating accurate and detailed description with her own sense of wonder: "up in the air--up, rather, in the leaves-- / purple, yellow, two yellows..." The same feeling that the Portuguese travelers experienced when first exposed to the exotic abandon of the Brazilian landscape is here identified with the poet's. "Our eyes" not only includes the perspective of the poet but also suggests, in its plurality, the perspective of other foreigners who must have experienced a similar impact. In a fusion of present and past, "Januaries" supposedly comprise the time January 1, 1502 (when a group of Portuguese colonists first saw the Guanabara Bay, and mistaking it for a river, named it River of January) and the poet's present time. In spite of at least 450 years of all sorts of invasion, Nature endures and still "greets our eyes." What starts as a subtle metaphor--nature as female--gains more evident implications of male aggression and female

retreat, as the poem develops. In regard to this subject, Robert Dale Parker observes,

> ...this is the only poem where Bishop subscribes to that familiar metaphor of a female Nature, a metaphor so commonplace that it usually goes unrecognized and taken for granted as natural fact. But it is not a natural fact. To see Nature as feminine is to objectify (to make an object of) femininity, which in the heterosexual world of this particular poem makes the subject--grammatically the perceiver of an actor upon Nature--masculine. (92)

This viewing of a Nature as a tapestry to be possessed, acknowledged by most of the criticism on the poem, also has political implications if one considers sexual possession in terms of colonial invasion. The visual movement suggested by the description of Nature itself implies a search for depth, according to Costello, "something within or behind the surface which we might possess" (145). She also explains that what starts as a frontal picture or a description of the foreground gradually gains depth as it moves to the background following the beholder's erotic desire to possess the landscape:

> A blue-white sky, a simple web,
> backing for feathery detail:
> brief arcs, a pale green broken wheel,
> a few palms, swarthy, squat, but delicate;
> and perching there in profile, beaks agape,
> the big symbolic birds keep quiet,
> each showing only half his puffed and padded,
> pure-colored or spotted breast.
> Still in the foreground there is Sin:
> five sooty dragons near some massy rocks.
> The rocks are worked with lichens, grey moonbursts
> splattered and overlapping,
> threatened from underneath by moss
> in lovely hell-green flames,
> attacked above
> by scaling-ladder vines, oblique and neat,
> "one leaf yes and one leaf no" (in Portuguese). (91)

The static presence of "the big symbolic birds" showing "only half" their body is a symbolic transition to the image of Sin that comes next. It suggests the idea of complicity, since the birds are present and quiet; a sort of "half-witnesses" for they cannot be seen entirely. Sin, here represented by the sinister figure of "the five sooty dragons", is also implicitly linked to the last line of this segment--"one leaf yes and one leaf no." For Goldensohn, this is an "implicit game of sexual consent--derived, withdrawn, derived, withdrawn" (Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry 202)... The reader can only perceive the irony suggested in this initial picture of Sin when the poet abruptly transforms the dragons into mere lizards:

> The lizards scarcely breathe; all eyes
> are on the smaller, female one, back-to,
> her wicked tail straigth up and over,
> red as red-hot wire.

To go back to Vendler's article on "domestication and domesticity," this process of miniaturizing dragons into lizards can also be interpreted as an attempt to domesticate what is strange.

Observing the lizards in heat had been in fact a pastime Bishop was very much used to in her house in Petrópolis. In November, 1959, she writes to Aunt Grace:

> There has just been a quick rain and hail storm with the sun shining at the same time--everything looks dazzling now and the lizards have started to come out again. Watching the lizards' love-making is one of our quiet sports here!--the male chases the female, bobbing his head up and down and puffing his throat in and out like a baloon--he is usually much larger and much uglier. The female runs ahead and if

> she is feeling friendly she raises her tail up over her back like a wire--it is bright red, almost neon-red, underneath. He hardly ever seems to catch up with her, though,--Sometimes the cat will pursue a huge one right through the living- room--usually when we have squeamish lady guests, who shriek--I think Tobias does it on purpose, really.[3]

The female lizard's attitude, which in the poem is of ready acceptance, here is conditioned by "if she is feeling friendly." Thus, the male's seducing game, completely ignored in the poem, becomes entirely dependent on the female's will. The male's disadvantage in this sort of game is suggestively expressed in the poem by his passiveness: "The lizards scarcely breathe; all eyes / are on the smaller, female one..." The difference in size, which, in the poem may be read as a sign of inferiority, is also ironically reversed in the text of the letter above. Being larger is not a question of having more power but of having an inferior plastic beauty. Both in the letter and in the poem the male's achievement is not resolved even when the poet shifts the focus from the lizards to the Christians, in pursuit of the little Indians "retreating, always retreating...":

> Just so the Christians, hard as nails,
> tiny as nails, and glinting,
> in creaking armor, came and found it all,
> not unfamiliar:
> no lover's walks, no bowers,
> no cherries to be picked, no lute music,
> but corresponding, nevertheless,
> to an old dream of wealth and luxury
> already out of style when they left home--
> wealth, plus a brand-new pleasure.
> Directly after Mass, humming perhaps
> L' Homme armé or some such tune,
> they ripped away into the hanging fabric,
> each out to catch an Indian for himself--
> those maddening little women who kept calling,
> calling to each other (or had the birds waked up?)
> and retreating, always retreating behind it. (92)

In confronting the new world, the explorers find it "not unfamiliar: /... but corresponding... / to an old dream of wealth and luxury." As with "Arrival at Santos," the expectations for a different world are not fulfilled. Instead of seeing something new, the invaders view Nature with eyes in the past, transferring to it old European models or familiar images. What is left is "an old dream... already out of style." For Parker, even the 'brand-new pleasure' suggested by the pursuit of the Indians is not actually new. He points out that: "Though the pleasure may be new in the sense of its easy availability, they respond to it in an old way. For they see the Indians as slaves and concubines ready for the picking" (93-94).

When the poem gets to its final scene with the explorers coming "directly after Mass" to rape the Indians, the irony implied in the poet's addressing them as "Christians" becomes more evident. In the name of Christianity and all the good intentions that "justify" the purposes of colonization, the explorers rape the women as they rape the landscape. But, unlike what happens behind the scenes in history, the explorers in the poem do not reach "those maddening little women" who keep on retreating. Rather than being an attitude of defeat, "retreating" is a way of enduring. Like the women, Nature also endures.

A very similar image of Indian women as enduring miniatures is present in Clarice Lispector's "The Smallest Woman in the World" which Bishop translated by the time "Brazil, January 1, 1502" was written. The woman in question in Lispector's story is a pigmy, "seventeen and three-quarter inches high, full-grown, black,

silent." Belonging to a tribe of pigmies in Equatorial Africa constantly threatened by another tribe that hunt them as preys, "Little Flower" is found by a French explorer:

> ... the great threat to the Likoualas is the savage Bantus, a threat that surrounds them in the silent air, like the dawn of battle. The Bantus hunts them with nets, like monkeys. And eat them. Like that: they catch them in nets and EAT them. The tiny race, retreating, always retreating, has finished hiding away in the heart of Africa, where the lucky explorer discovered it.[4]

The attitude of survival by retreating, always retreating, is the same in both texts. As some critics propose, to accept the poet's identification with the conquistadors is to deny her sympathy with these little women and her despise for the agressor, a position that is implicitly privileged by the development of the action of the poem itself. As Schwartz observes, what seems more plausible to consider is not the identification with the conquerors' "old dream of wealth and luxury" but, rather, the understanding of the desire for "brand new pleasure" ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 91). Even so, this kind of empathy can only be taken for granted implicitly and ironically. On the other hand, emphasizing a one-sided feminist reading of the poem is also problematic. Although the female presence is privileged by the development of the action and the male agression described in subtle tones of mockery, the poet keeps her impartiality as a mere observer. In this respect, Goldensohn points out that: "the poem resists a too-insistently framed ideology: an identifiable, controlling perspective, coming from a speaker clearly and continuously in command of the poem's opinions seem to be missing"

(Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry 199).

If the poet's perspective is not clearly identifiable, her "power of reticence,"to use Octavio Paz's famous words referring to Bishop's poetry, can be detected between the lines, emerging in satire against the violence of the colonialist occupation. Nothing could be more subtle than going back to the past and taking off the frame historical characters, to represent in the fictional world of poetry the figures of "the oppressor" and "the oppressed." In doing so,the poet lets the reader acknowledge this fact, whether belonging only to the past or not. In the same way, a choice that at first sight seems quite obvious--the gender identification of oppressor and oppressed--becomes more elusive and intriguing, as the poem develops. Nature, lizards, or "those maddening little women," are characters with different features and roles in the poem, who cannot be reduced to a single label. No matter what theory one has in mind when reading the poem, the poet's perspective remains oblique; what is left to interpretation is the voice of action itself.

In spite of showing the first evidences of political awareness or historical concern, the poet is still a detached observer handling her characters in unreal sceneries. The tourist disappointed at the first real images of Brazil searches in the past a landscape that can "greet" her eyes. It is still the fantastic that calls her attention. More casual images "remain to be seen."

After the meagerness of the landscape in "Arrival at Santos" and its abundance in "Brazil, January 1, 1502," the poet of "Questions of "Travel" seems satiated of scenery and ready to

perceive what else there is in "this strangest of theatres." The opening of the poem reflects this idea of saturation:

> There are too many waterfalls here; the crowded streams
> hurry too rapidly down the sea,
> and the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops
> makes them spill over the sides in soft slow-motion,
> turning to waterfalls under our very eyes.
> --For it those streaks, those mile-long, shiny,
> tearstains,
> aren't waterfalls yet,
> in a quick age or so, as ages go here,
> they probably will be.
> But if the streams and clouds keep travelling,
> travelling,
> the mountains look like the hulls of capsized ships,
> slime-hung and barnacled. (93)

What disturbs the observer is not only the excess of landscape but also the temporal instability determined by a permanent state of mutation. The speed in this flux of mutation leads the poet to witness changes in process: "and the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops / makes them spill over the sides in soft slow-motion, / turning to waterfalls under our very eyes." Future changes also become predictable as if the poet's imagination tried to follow the flux of nature itself. Even the mountains are not static but subject to the movement of "the streams and clouds."

In a letter to James Merrill, Bishop expresses this same idea of landscape in excess:

> You say you imagine me in a "Rousseau jungle" - well, it is as beautiful as one, I think, but a lot sparser and rougher, and where I live, 50 miles or so from Rio, much more perpendicular. Like the "Sugar Loaf" in Rio harbor only a great many of them, much bigger, inland a ways--with clouds spilling over the tops sometimes, or waterfalls coming and going according to the weather (there's

> an awful lot of weather here). Things are very much out of scale, too, like a Rousseau--or out of our scale, that is...[5]

Here the poet reveals the parameters for her opening remarks: "Things are very much out of scale... or out of our scale." It is too much for "her" scale or for the scale of any foreigner possibly submitted to the same kind of experience. Again expectation and reality are in conflict. While in "Arrival at Santos" the landscape is not enough to fulfill her demands, in "Questions of Travel" it "spills over" the limits of her expectation.

The second stanza begins with an imperative, apparently interrupting the poet's interaction with the external world. This is a significant moment of reflection in which, for the first time, the poet questions her quest:

> Think of the long trip home.
> Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?
> Where should we be today?
> Is it right to be watching strangers in a play
> in this strangest of theatres?
> What childishness is it that while there's a breath of life
> in our bodies, we are determined to rush
> to see the sun the other way around?
> The tiniest green hummingbird in the world?
> To stare at some inexplicable old stonework,
> inexplicable and impenetrable,
> at any view,
> instantly seen and always, always delightful?
> Oh, must we dream our dreams
> and have them, too?
> And have we room
> for one more folded sunset, still quite warm? (93)

Costello identifies in the beginning of this stanza four different aspects of the poet's quest: "the quest for the exotic ('strangest of theatres'), for the new perspective ('the sun the

other way round'), for the unique ('the tiniest green hummingbird'), and for the mysterious ('inexplicable old stonework')." She considers them "presymbolic" or "postsymbolic" and void of any structure or pattern (155). Nevertheless, considering these aspects-- exoctic, new, unique, mysterious--as opposed to another kind of quest underlying the poem, that is, the quest for a home, it is possible to establish a pattern. "Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?", questions the traveler. What is in fact "here" if home turns out at the end of the poem to be "wherever." "Here," this ambivalent and temporary home, is for the poet the "strangest of theatres." In some corner, behind the scenes or in the audience, the poet's role is to observe 'strangers in a play.' Her viewing people like strangers is a sort of self-reflection of her condition as a foreigner.

This stanza finishes with no answer but with some questions to be tested: "What childishness is it that while there's a breath of life / in our bodies, we are determined to rush / to see the sun the other way around?" Are the poet's motives a question of childishness? Or mere pleasure for the sensation of discovery? Or would it be for the pleasure of "the instantly seen and always, always delightful?" Maybe it would be the desire for "possessing" dreams even taking the risk of losing them once turned into reality. The next segment of the poem marks a shift from the questioning on the motives of the travel to a questioning on what would have been lost if this travel had not happened:

> But surely it would have been a pity
> not to have seen the trees along this road,
> really exaggerated in their beauty,
> not to have seen them gesturing

like noble pantomimists, robed in pink.
--Not to have had to stop for gas and heard
the sad, two-noted, wooden tune
of disparate wooden clogs
carelessly clacking over
a grease-stained filling-station floor.
(In another country the clogs would all be tested.
Each pair there would have identical pitch.)
--A pity not to have heard
the other, less primitive music of the fat brown bird
who sings above the broken gasoline pump
in a bamboo church of Jesuit baroque:
three towers, five silver crosses.
--Yes, a pity not to have pondered,
blurr'dly and inconclusively,
on what connection can exist for centuries
between the crudest wooden footwear
and, careful and finicky,
the whittled fantasies of the wooden cages.
--And never to have had to listen to rain
so much like politicians' speeches:
two hours of unrelenting oratory
and then a sudden golden silence
in which the traveller takes a notebook... (93-94)

In the beginning of this third stanza, things are still "out of scale": the trees along the road look "really exaggerated in their beauty." In comparing them to "pantomimists" the poet brings back the idea of theatricality which in the former stanza appears linked to people and to her own relationship, as a foreigner, with "this strangest of theatres." The images depicted along the road from this moment on constitute what Gilberto Freyre would call a more authentic Brazil. Referring to what could be considered a stereotyped vision of Brazil, Freyre states that

> Too many foreign observers tend to see only what is metropolitan or picturesque, what is progressive or archaic: São Paulo or Rio, naked savages or the Amazon River. But it is between these antagonistic extremes that the real Brazil lies... (112)

Although this mosaic of images can still seem picturesque to the traveler's eyes, it is the first sample of a domestic Brazil, easily recognizable between the "antagonistic extremes" mentioned by Freyre.

The comparison between the "disparate wooden clogs" and the clogs of another country shows a different kind of irony. Instead of praising the technology that would give the foreign clogs an "identical pitch," the poet is ironically using it as a counterpoint for the craftsmanship of the "home" clogs. Being different is here a question of musical advantage: at least the "home" clogs have two tunes. Gradually in the poem the images become more familiar and the sounds "less primitive." It is, then, the moment for the traveler to ponder on the complexity of this live culture, yet "blurr'dly and inconclusively." For Thomas J. Travisano, "The intricacies of this culture (as the songbirds' cages attest) are not the intricacies of commerce or technology but the intricacies of devotion--to iconography, tradition, and craftsmanship" (144). Travisano concludes that the experience of being exposed to this sort of culture could never be conveyed by simple imagination (144). This is exactly the conclusion that the traveler arrives at when, in a moment of silence or of inner travel, she takes a notebook and writes:

> "Is it lack of imagination that makes us come
> to imagined places, not just stay at home?
> Or could Pascal have not been entirely right
> about just sitting quietly in one's room?
>
> Continent, city, country, society:
> the choice is never wide and never free.
> And here, or there... No. Should we have stayed at home,
> wherever that may be? (94)

The poem itself answers the last question and, as Travisano observes, Bishop's personal choice of traveling and remaining in Brazil over "just sitting quietly in one's room" reiterates the answer (145).

Although the first steps toward the perception of images of a more authentic Brazil have decidedly been taken in "Questions of Travel," in this group of poems, the poet's perspective remains intimately associated with her own identification as a "tourist" and a "traveler." The predominance of landscape descriptions is probably the result of the impact that Brazilian tropical nature must have caused in the poet. According to Freyre, this would be a natural tendency that foreigners usually have in looking for the picturesque. Another aspect to be oberved in these first three poems about Brazil is the almost complete absence of Brazilian human types. If it were not for the anonymous "boy" of "Arrival at Santos," "those maddening little women" brought from the past in "Brazil, January 1,1502", the impersonal "strangers" or the reduction of "human" to the nameless sound of "wooden clogs" in "Questions of Travel," Brazil would be not only the "strangest" but the "emptiest" of theatres. What is important to point out is not the sense of quantity that these characters represent but the sense of absence implied in their lack of identity. The lens through which the observer views this impersonal population may as well be reversed to the vision of her own impersonal condition as a foreigner.

The next group of poems about Brazil moves towards a more genuine vision of both characters and scenery. The richness of

images and the variety of themes is a consequence of the poet's exposure to the different features of Brazilian reality. For Goldensohn, Bishop's experience in Brazil brings about significant changes in her poetry. Goldensohn submits that

> During these years even her landscapes gained in human rather than animal population, as a description colored more and more by the waking real and less and less by the fantastically dreamed began to take in urban and village life... (Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry Preface . xi)

This process of growth in Bishop's poetry follows the development of her own perception of Brazil. The tourist or the traveler gradually becomes a kind of poetic mediator concerned with passing to the readers the most accurate images of Brazil.

# NOTES

[1] All quotations of Elizabeth Bishop's published poetry are taken from Elizabeth Bishop: The Complete Poems, 1927-1979 (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1983).

[2] This passage is part of Bishop's notes meant for the book about Brazil that she wanted to publish, after the controversial edition of Brazil by Time & Life, in which the editors left out a good deal of material. The book Bishop had in mind, certainly a more authentic picture of Brazil, would be entitled Black Beans and Diamonds. All citations of Bishop's unpublished poetry and prose are taken from her special collection held by the Vassar College Library, in Poughkeepsie, New York. The quotation in question belongs to the series Brazil, Box 36, Folder 574.

[3] Elizabeth Bishop, unpublisheed letter to Aunt Grace [Bowers], 12 November 1959, Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Box 18, Folder 255.

[4] This quotation is taken from Bishop's originals awkwardly placed, as published material, under Poetry. Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Box 31, Folder 477.

[5] Elizabeth Bishop, unpublished letter to James Merrill, 1 March 1955, Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Box 20, Folder 279.

# CHAPTER III

## FROM PERCEPTION OF TO IDENTIFICATION WITH "THE OTHER"

The next two poems in Questions of Travel--"Squatter's Children" and "Manuelzinho"--mark a sensible shift in the persona's view, represented by the perception of "the other." The two "specklike" children and Manuelzinho are the first Brazilian human types to be closely observed in Bishop's poetry. In these poems, the scenery, which so far had been the chief protagonist, moves to the background. It is as if, after working extensively on the scenery of this "strangest of theatres," it is eventually time to spotlight the actor's performance.

"Electrical Storm" and "Song for the Rainy Season," the two other poems that follow, show a change of focus determined by a spatial reason: both poems are restricted to the limits of the house or the domain of "home." Whithin these limits it is possible to observe the poet's relationship with her private world--a particularly "domestic" Brazil--and to what extent the sense of home is linked to this relationship.

Another significant feature in this process of perception of Brazil is the concern with "the other." Already manifested in "Squatter's Children," the poet's interest in social and political problems becomes more visible after the 1950s. "The Burglar of Babylon," the last in the set of poems gathered in the Brazil

section of Questions of Travel, is an open response to such evils.

The decision to include "Pink Dog" in this chapter has not happened without considering first the time the poem started to be written (1963-1964) and, second, what the poem itself represents in the development of the poet's vision in regard to social problems. Yet, the poem's placement cannot be effected without taking into account that it only came out in 1979, a year after "Santarém." Thus, in terms of chronology, "Pink Dog" conveys the last images of Brazil in Bishop's poetry, still a polemic issue among critics and readers. For this reason the poem will reappear in chapter four of this dissertation, in a parallel with "Santarém."

Among all the poems of Questions of Travel, "The Riverman" represents the most important moment concerning the relationship between the poet and the world of "the other." For the first time the poet experiences the "I" of the poem, adopting another identity. The use of a mask allows the poet to identify herself with "the other." For Lorrie Goldensohn, it was the use of the dramatic persona in this poem "which made later monologues like the child from 'In the Waiting Room' and the solitary in 'Crusoe in England' possible" (Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry 211).

## III.1 PERCEPTION OF "THE OTHER"

"Squatter's Children" opens with an ordinary scene in the voice of a detached third-person narrator:

On the unbreathing sides of hills
they play, a specklike girl and boy,
alone, but near a specklike house.
The sun's suspended eye
blinks casually, and then they wade
gigantic waves of light and shade.
A dancing yellow spot, a pup,
attends them. Clouds are piling up; (95)

At first sight, the contrast in size between the two "specklike" children, "a specklike house," "a dancing yellow spot, a pup" and the threatening scenery seems to be merely the result of the narrator's detachment. Nevertheless, as the poem develops, it is possible to observe that whatever is related to the children and could stand for a symbol of protection is deliberately small, indefinite or vulnerable. The idea of abandonment or lack of protection is metaphorically reinforced by the coming of the rain. The children, however, continue to play, indifferent to the dangers they are exposed to:

a storm piles up behind the house.
The children play at digging holes.
The ground is hard; they try to use
one of their father's tools,
a mattock with a broken haft
the two of them can scarcely lift.
It drops and clangs. Their laughter spreads
effulgence in the thunderheads,

weak flashes of inquiry
direct as is the puppy's bark.
But to their little, soluble,
unwarrantable ark,
apparently the rain's reply
consists of echolalia,
and Mother's voice, ugly as sin,
keeps calling them to come in. (95)

The children's impotence is suggested even in their play when they try to use a mattock "the two of them can scarcely lift." Their laughter, "weak flashes of inquiry," are as useless as the puppy's bark, for there is no answer to them. Far from being a trusty shelter, their ark is "little, soluble, / unwarrantable." Not less vulnerable is the house from where the "Mother's voice, ugly as sin,/ keeps calling to them to come in." What starts as a physical abandonment with the children exposed to the rain ends up, in the final stanza, revealing deeper implications and denouncing the indifference of the law towards their rights:

> Children, the threshold of the storm
> has slid beneath your muddy shoes;
> wet and beguiled, you stand among
> the mansions you may choose
> out of a bigger house than yours,
> whose lawfulness endures.
> Its soggy documents retain
> your rights in rooms of falling rain. (95)

The idea of vulnerability first linked to the children and all that could stand for their protection now appears linked to their rights: "out of a bigger house than yours, / whose lawfulness endures. / Its soggy documents retain / your rights in rooms of falling rain." The poet, who so far had kept her detachment as mere observer, interrupts the narrative and speaks directly to the children. In doing so, her protest gains a more personal tone revealing not only her sympathy for the children's cause but also a certain involvement.

A more dramatic image of abandonment is found in a passage on a trip on the Rio São Francisco. During a stop in Juazeiro, on the

way back to the boat, Bishop passes by a small square and spots a child:

> A very tiny praça--almost totally dark. One street light. On the corner, a big sheet of sacking or something like that spread out, a few pots and pans, a bundle, odds and ends, all dark and mysterious and travel worn--and in the middle of it all, a tiny, tiny child--sitting up straight, absolutely alone. Possibly a year old--possibly more --it's hard to say--a little girl, in rags, her very thin legs folded budha (sic) like--absolutely alone in the praça in the dark, in the river-wind. I went over to her. Maybe she couldn't walk yet, maybe she was crippled--The little folded legs were so thin. I tried to talk to her but she looked frightened--at the same time, she automatically held out her hand to beg. Her parents must have gone off to find a place to stay or something to eat--well, who knows. I put a conto--tucked it down inside her filthy little shirt--I was afraid if I left it in her hand someone might steal it. (40 cents, now, maybe--but this still will buy quite a bit in those parts.) She didn't speak, couldn't, maybe. 2 or 3 other people had now gathered on the sidewalk in back of me--where the light was--but they expressed sympathy: "Coitadinha--all alone," and so on,--So I left her there, a little silent scrap awaiting God knows what.[1]

A "tiny, tiny child--sitting up straight absolutely alone" has much in common with "a specklike girl and boy, alone." While in the poem the poet's detachment is broken by a direct address, in the note this approach is also physical: she gets closer to the child and tries to talk to her. Nevertheless, neither in the note nor in the poem the poet's voice reaches the children, who end up alone, exposed to their own fate.

If "Squatter's Children" marks an important step toward "the human" and the concern with "the other," "Manuelzinho" stands for the particularization of 'the other.' One of Bishop's most lively and detailed portraits, it has been the subject of controversial

interpretations among critics. A definition of poetic perspective, in terms of point of view, and whether or not "Manuelzinho" is condescending, both in terms of tone and thematic treatment, have been the two crucial points in the analyses of the poem. Referring to the progression that Bishop's poems follow in terms of "sensitivity to communal, or historic context," Lorrie Goldensohn briefly tackles the problem of "condescension":

> The most direct example of this progression seems the shift from the amused and affectionate condescensions of "Manuelzinho", trained on the firmly quaint foibles of Lota's lovable servant, to "The Riverman." (Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry 193)

For Thomas J. Travisano, the question of "condescension" is directly related to the question of point of view. He observes that, since the poem is a dramatic monologue told in the voice of "a friend of the writer," it presents "two specific points of view, the speaker's and Manuelzinho's, both of which are separate from Bishop's" (146). Travisano explains that,

> In "Manuelzinho," Bishop observes a poor man with empathy and humor, but she also implicitly presents her observations of leading characteristics of the Brazilian gentry: their paternalism, their puzzlement at the curious ways of their tenants, and, yes, their condescension. Condescension is the implicit but central issue of the poem. (146)

Hence, Travisano recognizes condescension on the part of the speaker, a point of view independent from the poet's. He also sees Manuelzinho and the speaker as archetypes built up upon the generalizations of a paternalistic behavior.

Candace Slater, on the other hand, considers the poem "comic but not condescending in its portrayal of a kind of once common relationship which is beginning to disappear" (36). For her, the paternalistic behavior in "Manuelzinho" is simply the portrait of a common social procedure. She concludes her analysis identifying this procedure as "the nonrigidity if not seeming illogic which has traditionally given life in Latin America much of its recognized warmth" (36).

"Manuelzinho" is also polemic for other reasons. Pointing out the importance of geography in Bishop's poetry, David Bromwich suggests how her "geography poems" should be read:

> ... few readers are likely to know even a single region as intimately as she knew two hemispheres; and to make her geography poems interesting we have to read them as poems about something else. With this need of ours, a whole tract of her writing refuses to cooperate; poems about squatters and other half-cherished neighbors--efforts of self-conscious whimsy (like "Manuelzinho") or of awkward condescension (like "Filling Station"). I think these are the only poems Bishop ever wrote that dwindle as one comes to see them more more clearly. (168)

Bromwich does not explain why these poems "refuse to cooperate" or why they "dwindle as one comes to see them more more clearly." What seems clear in his analysis is that the result of the reading depends on how the poems are read. Therefore, Bromwich introduces another aspect to be considered, that is, the perspective of the reader. I would add to it the question of context, background, and geography involving the reader. Wouldn't the "whimsicality" that Bromwich sees in "Manuelzinho" be conditoned to "geographical" questions of perspective? Bishop herself has considered questions

of context when, in a letter to Lowell, she says:

> I am pleased you said you liked my "Manuelzinho" --somehow when he appeared just now, in the New Yorker, he seemed more frivolous than I'd thought-- but maybe that's just the slick, rich surroundings.[2]

"Manuelzinho," the ordinary servant who has caused so much controversy among critics, is first introduced as "the world's worst gardener":

> Half squatter, half tenant (no rent)--
> a sort of inheritance; white,
> in your thirties now, and supposed
> to supply me with vegetables,
> but you don't; or you won't; or you can't
> get the idea through your brain--
> the world's worst gardener since Cain.
> Tilted above me, your gardens
> ravish my eyes. You edge
> the beds of silver cabbages
> with red carnations, and lettuces
> mix with alyssum. And then
> umbrella ants arrive,
> or it rains for a solid week
> and the whole thing's ruined again
> and I buy you more pounds of seeds,
> imported, guaranteed,
> and eventually you bring me
> a mystic three-legged carrot,
> or a pumpkin "bigger than the baby." (96)

In spite of having no technical ability to be a good gardener, Manuelzinho has a strange creative sense that makes his gardens "ravish" their owners' eyes. In edging "the bed of silver cabbages with red carnations" and mixing "lettuces" with "alyssum," Manuelzinho escapes the conventional and transforms the ordinary in a sort of work of art. Even if this work of art is not lasting, his persistence brings outstanding results: "a mystic three-legged

carrot, / or a pumpkin 'bigger than the baby'." Due to misfortune, bad luck, or simply an awkward way of doing things, Manuelzinho is always in trouble:

> I watch you through the rain,
> trotting, light, on bare feet,
> up the steep paths you have made--
> or your father or grandfather made--
> all over my property,
> with your head and back inside
> a sodden burlap bag,
> and I feel I can't endure it
> another minute; then,
> indoors, beside the stove,
> keep on reading a book.
>
> You steal my telephone wires,
> or someone does. You starve
> your horse and yourself
> and your dogs and family.
> Among endless variety,
> you eat boiled cabbage stalks.
> And once I yelled at you
> so loud to hurry up
> and fetch me those potatoes
> your holey hat flew off,
> you jumped out of your clogs,
> leaving three objects arranged
> in a triangle at my feet,
> as if you'd been a gardener
> in a fairy tale all this time
> and at the word "potatoes"
> had vanished to take up your work
> of fairy prince somewhere. (96-97)

And "the strangest things" happen to him, proceeds the "friend of the writer:"

> [His] cow eats a "poison grass"
> and drops dead on the spot.
> Nobody else's does.
> And then your father dies,
> a superior old man
> with a black plush hat, and a moustache
> like a white spread-eagled sea gull.
> The family gathers, but you,
> no, you "don't think he's dead!
> I look at him. He's cold.
> They're burying him today.
> But you know, I don't think he's dead."

I give you money for the funeral
and you go and hire a bus
for the delighted mourners,
so I have to hand over some more
and then have to hear you tell me
you pray for me every night! (96-97)

The speaker "can't endure it / another minute" and her refuge is her private world--"indoors"--where she apparently ignores Manuelzinho's mistakes and keeps on "reading a book." Here she defines the physical boundaries between her world and Manuelzinho's as if trying to preserve a certain "order" or a certain "code" in their relationship. Yet, although the speaker tries to establish such limits, when she compares him to a prince in a fairy tale, she cannot hide a sort of silent admiration for this illogic figure. Manuelzinho is unpredictable even in face of death. His attitude in using up the money for the funeral to "hire a bus for the delighted mourners" has more of naiveté and inconsequence than properly of smartness, in the sense of taking some advantage of the situation. The hiring of a bus for mourners portrays a very common practice of popular culture that nowadays survives only in the interior of Brazil.

The speaker, the great provider for Manuelzinho's most urgent necessities, also has her time to settle her accounts with him:

And then you come again,
sniffing and shivering,
hat in hand, with that wistful
face, like a child's fistful
of bluets or white violets,
improvident as the dawn,
and once more I provide
for a shot of penicillin
down at the pharmacy, or
one more bottle of
Electrical Baby Syrup.
Or, briskly, you come to settle

what we call our "accounts,"
with two old copybooks,
one with flowers on the cover,
the other with a camel.
Immediate confusion.
You've left out the decimal points.
Your columns stagger,
honeycombed with zeros.
You whisper conspiratorially,
the numbers mount to millions.
Account books? They are Dream Books.
In the kitchen we dream together
how the meek shall inherit the earth--
or several acres of mine. (97-98)

"Hat in hand," the meek Manuelzinho again has to count on his provider for "a shot of penicillin" or "one more bottle of / Electrical Baby Syrup." When he shows up to settle his accounts, his "columns stagger, / honeycombed with zeros"; "the numbers mount to millions."[3] Even in a tone of mockery, this is a moment of communion: "In the kitchen we dream together / how the meek shall inherit the earth." A similar biblical reference in the first draft of the poem related to the next episode with Formoso, the donkey, brings back this empathy with the meek:

both just standing there staring
off into fog and space
It is true, isn't it true, that blessed are the meek?[4]

While the biblical reference which appears in the poem's final version suggests mockery, followed as it is by "or several acres of mine," the one which the poet has preferred to discard expresses reflection.

Between the episode of Manuelzinho's accounts and the one of Formoso, the speaker shifts the focus of the poem to present the children:

With blue sugar bags on their heads,
carrying your lunch,
your children scuttle by me
like little moles aboveground,
or even crouch behind bushes
as if I were out to shoot them!
--Impossible to make friends,
though each will grab at once
for an orange or a piece of candy. (98)

"With blue sugar bags on their heads," a protection for the sun or the rain, or maybe just a funny hat, the children hide themselves like freightened little animals perceiving human approach. This primitive behavior and the absence of verbal communication brings to one's mind the anonymous children of Vidas Secas, by Graciliano Ramos. Like in the Brazilian novel, it is possible to recognize in this passage of the poem a very well known feature of the Brazilian children's behavior that still exists mainly in the rural areas. In spite of having no verbal interaction between the speaker and Manuelzinho's children,"each [child] will grab at once / for an orange or a piece of candy." This means that there is a code of communication that also establishes the limits between them and the speaker. The passage that follows, on Manuelzinho and Formoso, also suggests in its mystic atmosphere a silent code of communication:

Twined in wisps of fog,
I see you all up there
along with Formoso, the donkey,
who brays like a pump gone dry,
then suddenly stops.
--All just standing, staring
off into fog and space.
Or coming down at night,
in silence, except for hoofs,
in dim moonlight, the horse
or Formoso stumbling after.
Between us float a few
big, soft, pale-blue,

sluggish fireflies,
the jellyfish of the air... (98-99)

For Bonnie Costello, the last three lines show "a bridge" between the speaker's world and Manuelzinho's. The critic interprets this "bridge" in terms of the speaker starting "to think like him" (83). I would not go so far as to try to guess what is in the speaker's mind, since there is no evidence in the poem that can support such an affirmative. What the speaker seems to suggest instead is the "suspended," indefinite tone of a silent communication that has more of understanding than properly of identification between these two creatures so much unlike.

The next passage, predominantly feminine or maternal, with Manuelzinho's wife mending the family's clothes and with his mother's concern with the appearance of his hat, brings back the idea of persistence that first appears related to Manuelzinho's work as a gardener:

Patch upon patch upon patch,
your wife keeps all of you covered.
She has gone over and over
(forearmed is forewarned)
your pair of bright-blue pants
with white thread, and these days
your limbs are draped in blueprints.
You paint--heaven knows why--
the outside of the crown
and brim of your straw hat.
Perhaps to reflect the sun?
Or perhaps when you were small,
your mother said, "Manuelzinho,
one thing: be sure you always
paint your straw hat."
One was gold for a while,
but the gold wore off, like plate.
One was bright green. Unkindly,
I called you Klorophyll Kid.
My visitors thought it was funny.
I apologize here and now. (99)

The persistent work of Manuelzinho's wife mending the clothes-- "patch upon patch upon patch," "over and over"--reveals an aspect of the Brazilian character which has not passed unnoticed by the poet's eyes: being "incredibly patient." Most of the time mistakenly interpreted as "indolence" or "passiveness," "patience" is seen by the poet as a way of survival in a reality which can hardly be changed. In Bishop's drafts for the Brazil book published by Time & Life, she writes:

> Everyone who visits Brazil agrees that ordinary, average Brazilians are a wonderful people: cheerful, sweet-tempered, witty, and patient--incredibly patient. To see them standing in line for hours, literally for hours, in lines folded back on themselves two or three times the length of a city block,--only to get aboard a broken-down, recklessly-driven bus and return to their tiny suburban houses, where, these days, as like as not, the street has not been repaired, nor the garbage collected, and there may even be no water--is to wonder at their patience.[5]

Manuelzinho's work in re-doing the garden and painting his hat so many times--"heaven knows why"--is also a question of patience and persistence. The speaker here apologizes for "unkindly" calling Manuelzinho "Klorophyll Kid"; yet there is affection implied in the apparent mockery. In the final stanza, the speaker manifests the ambivalence of her feelings for this "helpless, foolish man." Her figurative attitude of taking off her hat reveals not only respect but understanding for the differences between them or, at least, a promise "to try:"

> You helpless, foolish man,
> I love you all I can,

I think. Or do I?
I take off my hat, unpainted
and figurative, to you.
Again I promise to try. (99)

Recognizing Bishop's voice in this poem has also been a polemic issue. Some critics support the assumption that, since it is told in the voice of "a friend of the writer's"--usually identified as Lota--,it is her perspective that it portrays and not the poet's.[6] Although this seems a logic deduction , taking it for granted would be ignoring the complexity that the use of a mask, a persona, represents in poetry. In this way, poems like "The Riverman," "Rainy Season: Sub-Tropics," and "Crusoe in England" could also be questioned, since the poet's voice is also "hidden" behind different personae in these poems. Similarly to what happens in the theatre, the use of a mask, more than a mere disguise, plays the role of integration. It is through the mask that the voice of the poet sounds. Taking into account the speaker's voice in the poem as a vehicle for the poet's, "Manuelzinho" could be considered "the perception of the perception of the other."

## III.2 SENSE OF HOME AND ANTICIPATION OF LOSS

While in "Squatter's Children" and in "Manuelzinho" the poet turns her attention to the world of "the other," in "Electrical Storm" and "Song for the Rainy Season" she focuses on the domain of her private world. Nature again comes to the foreground as a natural consequence of the poet's exposure to a tropical climate

and its alternate cycles of sun and rain.

"Electrical Storm" starts under the perspective of someone who is inside the house. All the senses are turned to the hailstorm and its immediate effects:

> Dawn an unsympathetic yellow.
> Cra-aack!--dry and light.
> The house was really struck.
> Crack! A tiny sound, like a dropped tumbler.
> Tobias jumped in the window, got in bed--
> silent, his eyes bleached white, his fur on end.
> Personal and spiteful as a neighbor's child,
> thunder began to bang and bump the roof.
> One pink flash;
> then hail, the biggest size of artificial pearls. (100)

It is possible to observe in this passage two antagonistic positions: the warmth of home represented by the figure of the cat getting in bed, and the natural opposite, the idea of shelter that is the storm itself. However the poet emphasizes the intensity of the storm, it does not strike her as something freightening--thunder sounds "personal and spiteful as a neighbor's child." In the remainder of the stanza the poet shifts her attention to the inside of the house and the later effects of the hailstorm:

> Dead-white, wax-white, cold--
> diplomats' wives' favors
> from an old moon party--
> they lay in melting windrows
> on the red ground until well after sunrise.
> We got up to find the wiring fused,
> no lights, a smell of salpetre,
> and the telephone dead. (100)

The presence of somebody else in the house, manifested in a vague "we," passes almost unnoticed. With the same discretion, the poet leaves the reader at the end of the poem only with the warmth

of "the sheets:"

> The cat stayed in the warm sheets.
> The Lent trees had shed all their petals:
> wet, stuck, purple, among the dead-eyed pearls. (100)

Tobias, the only direct personal reference in the poem, was actually one of Bishop's pets in Samambaia, Lota's house in Petrópolis. Besides this reference, he has also deserved a whole page in a note on his habits, special care, diet and personality. Among other curious details about him, Bishop states that

> ... He's pretty fussy about the ground meat and won't eat it if it's old... He has no Freudian difficulties and a lovely disposition, but of course he'll steal and commit murder when he gets a chance.[7]

In another passage of an unpublished poem, Tobias appears again as a possible victim of a social evil: poverty.

> In the backward countries
> they eat cat.
> Pets are not safe
> if they are fat.
>
> They say that roasted
> cat tastes sweet
> that once you begin
> to eat such meat
>
> you crave it more
> than anything else.
> I saw an old man
> eyeing Tobias
>
> my fat, black cat, who, calm, sat
> on a sun-warmed stone.
> He leaned to pat
>
> Tobias, but
> was that gentle
> pat caress

or an appraisal?

Oh rich sub-tropics!
Oh poverty![8]

The social concern is a specific feature of the perception of "the other" that will be further brought to analysis. In the poem above it is possible to observe how feeble the lines that separate the poet's private world from the world of "the other" are, as the speaker's cat is threatened by the effects of the "neighbor" poverty.

"Song for the Rainy Season" starts in an atmosphere of complete privacy, as if protected by nature itself:

Hidden, oh hidden
in the high fog
the house we live in,
beneath the magnetic rock,
rain-, rainbow-ridden,
where blood-black
bromelias, lichens,
owls, and the lint
of the waterfalls, cling,
familiar, unbidden.

In a dim age
of water
the brook sings loud
from a rib cage
of giant fern; vapor
climbs up the thick growth
effortlessly, turns back,
holding them both,
house and rock,
in a private cloud.

At night, on the roof,
blind drops crawl
and the ordinary brown
owl gives us proof
he can count:
five times--always five--
he stamps and takes off
after the fat frogs that,
shrilling for love,
clamber and mount. (101)

The poet who was disturbed by the excess of landscape in "Questions of Travel" seems now used to it. Even the sounds of the waterfalls are now familiar. "The house we live in" subtly suggests another presence, a possible family, but it also conceals the idea of ownership. The seclusion suggested in the first stanza is reinforced by the image of vapor "holding them both, / House and rock, / in a private cloud," establishing a sort of mystic harmony between the house and nature. The noise of the raindrops on the roof and the sounds of the owl and the frogs also get to the poet's ears with familiarity.

The following lines present the house "open" to a perfect communion with nature and its small creatures:

> House, open house
> to the white dew
> and the milk-white sunrise
> kind to the eyes,
> to membership
> of silver fish, mouse,
> bookworms,
> big moths; with a wall
> for the mildew's
> ignorant map;
>
> darkened and tarnished
> by the warm touch
> of the warm breath,
> maculate, cherished,
> rejoice!... (101-102)

Projecting herself to a "later era," the poet anticipates loss as part of the irreversible cycles of nature:

> ... For a later
> era will differ.
> (O difference that kills,
> or intimidates, much

of all our small shadowy
life!) Without water

the great rock will stare
unmagnatized, bare,
no longer wearing
rainbows or rain,
the forgiving air
and the high fog gone;
the owls will move on
and the several
waterfalls shrivel
in the steady sun. (102)

"Difference," appearing immediately after the verb "differ," suggests not only "change" but change in process. It also implies something beyond the limits of the context of the poem; something uncontrollable that somehow is part of the poet's life. The foresight of loss seems to be the consciousness of this inevitable force.

Having been to Samambaia, the house referred to in the poem, years after Bishop's death, Lorrie Goldensohn writes in her book her impressions of the visit:

> This house, this lavish spread of buildings and grounds, was only another rich person's country place. The traces of the occupancy I was interested in had long been eliminated... As I'd stared around, bewildered, at the small and rather characterless block to which I'd been conducted as the studio Lota built for Elizabeth, bereft of its former occupant's books and clavichord, I found myself thinking, not of studios, but of the boarded-up house in Duxbury, in "The End of March", where "Everything was withdrawn as far as possible, "indrawn" and in that "dubious... proto-dream-house;" (Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry 25)

What was poetically left from Samambaia was a brief sense of home linked to "the rainy season." The anticipation of loss, manifested in "Song for the Rainy Season" by the transience of the cycles of

nature itself, appears in a letter from Bishop to Lowell, dated July 8th, 1955, as the fear of loss:

> I am extremely happy here, although I can't quite get used to being "happy," but one remnant of my old morbidity is that I keep fearing that the few people I'm fond of may be in automobile accidents, or suffer some sort of catastrophe... The word for even a small accident here is "desastre" so I often have false alarms.[9]

Surely it was not accidentally that the word "disaster" has been chosen to express the feeling of loss in "One Art." This word recurrently appears in three lines of the poem--"...that their loss is no disaster. / ... None of these will bring disaster. / ... but it wasn't a disaster."--and, in the final line, is used to embody the sense of loss itself: "though it may look (Write it!) like disaster." In "One Art", the anticipation of loss foreseen in "Song for the Rainy Season" is consumated:

> ... And look! my last, or
> next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
> ...
> I lost two cities, lovely ones. And ,vaster,
> some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent. (178)

The outer world, practically excluded in "Electrical Storm" and "Song for the Rainy Season," appears in snapshots of ordinary scenes taken from an apartment in Leme. Held among Bishop's unpublished poems, "Apartment in Leme" starts with a monologue in which the poet addresses the sea and the seascape:

> Off to the left, those islands, named and re-named
> so many times now everyone's forgotten
> their names, are sleeping.

Pale rods of light, the morning's implements,
lie in among them tarnishing already,
just like our knives and forks.

Because we live at your open mouth, oh Sea,
with your cold breath blowing warm, your warm breath
cold,
like in the fairy tale.

Not only do you tarnish our knives and forks
--regularly the silver coffee-pot goes into
dark, rainbow-edged eclipse;

the windows blur and mirrors are wet to touch.
Custodia complains, and then you frizz
her straightened, stiffened hair.

Sometimes you embolden, sometimes bore.
You smell of codfish and old rain. Homesick, the salt
weeps in the salt-cellars.

Breath in. Breath out. We're accustomed to
those sounds we only hear them in the night.
Then they come closer

but you keep your distance.

The same vague "we" of "Electrical Storm" and "Song for the "Rainy Season" suggests the existence of a supposed family. Like Tobias, Custodia is the only member of the household who is personally identified. While in the previous poems the sense of warmth is brought by the rainy season, here it is conveyed by the sea: "with your cold breath blowing warm, your warm breath cold, / like in the fairy tale." The poet is not only accustomed to the sounds of the sea but seems also familiarized with the ordinary images of the outside world that she observes from the apartment:

It's growing lighter. On the beach two men
get up from shallow newspaper-lined graves.
A third sleeps on. His coverlet

is corrugated paper, a flattened box.
One running dog, two early bathers, stop
dead in their tracks; detour.

> Wisps of fresh green stick to your foamy lips
> like those on horses' lips. The sand's bestrewn:
> white lilies, broken stalks,
>
> white candles with wet, blackened wicks,
> and green glass bottles for white alcohol
> meant for the goddess meant to come last night.
>
> (But you've emptied them all.)[10]

In brief snapshots, the poet gives here a very faithful image of the everyday routine on the beaches in Rio and includes a popular ritual--the Ubanda offerings--as part of this routine. It is interesting to observe that what would certainly look picturesque to foreigners' eyes no longer impresses the poet's.

The sense of home so subtly masqueraded in the descriptions present in this set of poems is the first evidence of the poet's familiariaty with "this strangest of theatres." However, these poems say little about the poet's private world; for obvious reasons of "reticence," they subtly demonstrate brief and rare moments in which the poet experiences the "sense of home."

## III.3 POETIC RESPONSES TO SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PROBLEMS

From the balcony of the same apartment in Leme, the poet sings, in the folk ballad "The Burglar of Babylon," the capture of Micuçu, the dangerous criminal who tries to hide himself on the Morro da Babilônia. In a note to an early edition of the poem Bishop states that:

> The story of Micuçú is true. It happened in Rio de Janeiro a few years ago. I have changed only one or two minor details, and, of course, translated the names of the slums. I think that actually the hill of Kerosene had been thorn down shortly before Micuçú's death, but I liked the word, so put it in.
>
> I was one of those who watched the pursuit through binoculars, although really we could see very little of it: just a few of the soldiers silhouette against the skyline of the hill of Babylon. The rest of the story is taken, often word for word, from the daily papers, filled out by what I know of the place and the people. (qtd. in Schwartz Elizabeth Bishop and Her Art 305)

What makes the poet's narrative different from the daily papers, or herself a different observer, is exactly what she knows "of the place and the people." Lloyd Schwartz defines the poet's view at the time as "informed by her intimate knowledge of the problems of urban Brazil" ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 91) (italics mine). Candace Slater also addresses this issue saying that "In her Brazilian pieces Bishop indicates a definite consciousness of injustices" (35).

The concern with "the other," already manifested in "Squatter's Children," gains in the journalistic account of "The Burglar of Babylon" the features of denunciation:

> On the fair green hills of Rio
> There grows a fearful stain:
> The poor who come to Rio
> And can't go home again.
>
> On the hills a million people,
> A million sparrows, nest,
> Like a confused migration
> That's had to light and rest,
>
> Building its nests, or houses,
> Out of nothing at all, or air.
> You'd think a breath would end them,
> They perch so lightly there.
>
> But they cling and spread like lichen,

And the people come and come.
There's one hill called the Chicken,
And one called Catacomb;

There's the hill of Kerosene,
And the hill of the Skeleton,
The hill of Astonishment,
And the hill of Babylon. (112)

The poet compares the migration of the slums to the movement of "a million sparrows... bulding... nests." It is an instinctive act of survival with no conscious purpose or planning. Like the squatter's children exposed to the rain, these people have no single notion of the dangers that they are exposed to. This can be observed, figuratively, by the vulnerability of their "nests": "You'd think a breath would end them." Having no choice or possibility to go back to their original places, "they cling and spread like lichen."

Among Bishop's drafts for the Brazil book, one finds the same image of the slums resembling birds' nests:

> ... even the favella (sic) architecture is hauntingly beautiful--horror and delicacy--colors--the oriental piling-up use of bamboo--little flas (sic), wooden lace etc --like birds' nests on a cliff--swallow or weaver birds on their cliffs--waver (sic) birds--oven birds on their cliffs--the horror concealed lightly decorated.[11]

From the migration of the slums, the poet moves her binoculars toward the pursuit of Micuçu:

Micuçú was a burglar and killer,
An enemy of society.
He had escaped three times
From the worst penitentiary.

They don't know how many he murdered
  (Though they say he never raped),
And he wounded two policeman
  This last time he escaped.

They said, "He'll go to his auntie,
  Who raised him like a son.
She has a little drink shop
  On the hill of Babylon."

He did go straight to his auntie,
  And he drank a final beer.
He told her, "The soldiers are coming,
  And I've got to disappear.

"Ninety years they gave me.
  Who wants to live that long?
I'll settle for ninety hours,
  On the hill of Babylon.

"Don't tell anyone you saw me.
  I'll run as long as I can.
You were good to me, and I love you,
  But I'm a doomed man."

Going out, he met a mulata
  Carrying water on her head.
"If you say you saw me, daughter,
  You're just as good as dead." (112-113)

Micuçu, a sort of folk anti-hero who had killed and "escaped three times / from the worst penitentiary," is also presented as a man of good feelings. He recognizes what his auntie has done to him and is conscious of his errors: "You were good to me, and I love you, / But I'm a doomed man." Following Micuçu's steps, the poet enlarges the snapshot of the slum showing nature around:

There are caves up there, and hideouts,
  And an old fort, falling down.
They use to watch for Frenchmen
  From the hill of Babylon

Below him was the ocean.
  It reached far up the sky,
Flat as a wall, and on it
  Were freighters passing by,

Or climbing the wall, and climbing
  Till each looked like a fly,
And then fell over and vanished;
  And he knew he was going to die.

He could hear the goats baa-baa-ing,
  He could hear the babies cry;
Fluttering kites strained upward;
  And knew he was going to die.

A buzzard flapped so near him
  He could see its naked neck.
He waved his arms and shouted,
  "Not yet, my son, not yet!"

An Army helicopter
  Came nosing around and in.
He could see two men inside it,
  But they never spotted him. (113-114)

As Micuçu tries to stay away from his captors, his consciousness that he is going to die grows. From this moment on, the juxtaposition of scenes shows different angles of the action: the soldiers, other people in the slum, and the rich with binoculars in their apartments. This cinematic technique allows the reader to have, as it were, a tri-dimensional vision of the scene with all its details.

The soldiers were all over,
  On all sides of the hill,
And right against the skyline
  A row of them, small and still.

Children peeked out of windows,
  And men in the drink shop swore,
And spat a little cachaça
  At the light cracks in the floor

But the soldiers were nervous, even
  With tommy guns in hand,
And one of them, in a panic,
  Shot the officer in command.

He hit him in three places;
  The other shots went wild.
The soldiers had hysterics

And sobbed like a little child.

The dying man said, "Finish
The job we came here for."
He committed his soul to God
And his sons to the Governor.

They ran and got a priest,
And he died in hope of Heaven
--A man from Pernambuco,
The youngest of eleven.

They wanted to stop the search,
But the Army said, "No, go on,"
So the soldiers swarmed again
Up the hill of Babylon.

Rich people in apartmnets
Watched through binoculars
As long as the daylight lasted.
And all night, under the stars, (114-115)

In this passage the captors become equally killers and victims like Micuçu. Instead of showing the habitual coolness or emotional control over the situation, the soldiers are "nervous." One of them panics and sobs "like a little child" after having killed the commander by mistake. Their sense of duty, however, is above "the human" and they go on with the capture.

The next segment shifts from the night Micuçu spent hidden from the soldiers to the first movements of the next morning:

Micuçú hid in the grasses
Or sat in a little tree,
Listening for sounds, and staring
At the lighthouse out at sea.

And the lighthouse stared back at him,
Till finally it was dawn.
He was soaked with dew, and hungry,
On the hill of Babylon

The yellow sun was ugly,
Like a raw egg on a plate--
Slick from the sea. He cursed it,
For he knew it sealed his fate.

He saw the long white beaches
  And people going to swim,
With towels and beach umbrellas,
  But the soldiers were after him.

Far, far bellow, the people
  Were little colored spots,
And the heads of those in swimming
  Were floating cononuts.

He heard the peanut vendor
  Go peep-peep on his whistle,
And the man that sells umbrellas
  Swinging his watchman's rattle.

Women with market baskets
  Stood on the corners and talked,
Then went on their way to market,
  Gazing up as they walked.

The rich with their binoculars
  Were back again, and many
Were standing on the rooftops,
  Among TV antennae. (115-116)

The quick movement from one snapshot to another and the variety of angles, distance and sounds suggest the continuity of life following its natural flow. The soldiers proceed with the capture and Micuçu is finally killed:

It was early, eight or eight-thirty.
  He saw a soldier climb,
Looking right at him. He fired,
  And missed for the last time.

He could hear the soldier panting,
  Though he never got very near.
Micuçú dashed for shelter.
  But he got it behind the ear.

He heard the babies crying
  Far, far away in his head,
And the mongrels barking and barking.
  Then Micuçú was dead.

He had a Taurus revolver,
  And just the clothes he had on,
With two contos in the pockets,
On the hill of Babylon. (116)

Suggestively, Micuçu dies hearing "the babies crying" and "the mongrels barking," other creatures as poor and helpless as he is. Micuçu's tragedy is only a fraction in a social context of a country where, according to Bishop, "the widespread poverty, backwardness, ignorance, and suffering" are equally "tragic." "For millions," she says,"life is hungry and dirty, short and cruel."[12]

After Micuçu's death, the poet presents the different reactions to it:

> The police and the populace
> Heaved a sigh of relief,
> But behind the counter his auntie
> Wiped her eyes in grief.
>
> "We have always been respected.
> My shop is honest and clean.
> I love him, but from a baby
> Micuçú was always mean.
>
> "We have always been respected.
> His sister has a job.
> Both of us gave him money.
> Why did he have to rob?
>
> "I raised him to be honest,
> Even here, in Babylon slum."
> The customers had another,
> Looking serious and glum.
>
> But one of them said to another,
> When he got outside the door,
> "He wasn't much of a burglar,
> He got caught six times--or more." (117)

Auntie's voice sounds to testify to the fact that Micuçu was not born a burglar. He was raised "to be honest" in spite of living in a slum. Maybe social determinism could answer auntie's question: "Why did he have to rob?"

Moreover, the use of the poetic device of repeating the first and the fifth stanzas emphasizes the idea of circularity, or the notion of continuation: the tragedy goes on.

> This morning the little soldiers
> Are on Babylon hill again;
> Their gun barrels and helmets
> Shine in a gentle rain.
>
> Micuçú is buried already.
> They're after another two,
> But they say they aren't as dangerous
> As the poor Micuçu.
>
> On the fair green hills of Rio
> There grows a fearful stain:
> The poor who come to Rio
> And can't go home again.
>
> There's the hill of Kerosene,
> And the hill of the Skeleton,
> The hill of Astonishment,
> And the hill of Babylon. (117-118)

In a very balanced judgment of the poem, Schwartz states that

> The Keystone Cops violence of "The Burglar of Babylon" is humanized by Bishop's nonjudgemental sympathy for the innocence and helplessness of both the criminal and his captors--all of them equally caught up in Brazil's self-contradictions. ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 91)

Already familiarized with Brazil's contradictions and with the main social, political and economic problems at the time, Bishop records her denunciation in an unfinished poem called "Brazil, 1959:"

> The radio says black beans are up again
> That means five hundred percent
> in the past year, but no one quite believes it.
> They're lying there, wherever they are raised,
> those that get to Rio are full of worms.
> Somehow most come to terms

Endless lines
waiting and waiting for the busses
with "wash me" written on their tails
and no rains
are doing it for them
...
I saw the families camped in the old band-stand
...
near the church beyond the cotton mills
night after night
among their rags and with a tiny fire
and all the color of the dirt of the north

I see the families who've come on foot
You say what are you doing? "travelling"
Meanwhile, you've never seen
a country that's more beautiful.
--or this part of it, ...--
The delicacy of the green hills
the new bamboos unfurl the edges
are all so soft against the pink watery skies
below, the purple Lent trees.

Shall we change politicians?
An honest mad man for a swap the playboy for the honest madman?
and is he really honest? It's a kind of joke.
...
The biggest crooks seem always full of "charm"
or buy Picassos
while their kitchens swarm
with aches and idle, sweaty cooks
who're charming, too,
and throw away one third
of every meal [13]

The poet, who in "The Burglar of Babylon" had preferred to remain anonymous among "the rich with their binoculars," identifies herself here, with a straightforward "I saw [see] the families..." Her criticism of politicians, even being "a kind of joke," or of "the biggest crooks ... full of charm" reveals a political involvement so far only implied in her poetry about Brazil. The waste of food in the rich kitchens can be considered a poetic metaphor for an old political problem in Brazil: incompetent administration. In one of her drafts for the Brazil book, Bishop

makes a serious reflection on this subject:

> There is no problem in Brazil that good government, good administration, could not resolve. This fact alone makes Brazil unique among the nations of the world. Under a good government industrial and material progress would undoubtedly take place at a tremendous rate--all the essentials are there.
>
> But before we condemn Brazil for not having achieved good government as yet--we should distinguish between "progress," "culture" and "civilization," all very different things. The idea of "civilization" has never been especially connected with that of good government. If one had to choose: is "bad" government so much worse than "good" government that leads to large-scale wars? Is an occasional assassination (although Brazil has actually had very few of them), or an almost-bloodless revolution, any worse than the death of thousands of innocent soldiers? Brazil has a considerable body of both sophisticated and still-living folk-culture. It has many qualities of character and society that go only with high civilization. While not making any exaggerated cultural or social claims for Brazil--still, the Greeks got along with bad governments, and so did the Italians of the Renascence--and no one thinks much the worse of them for it today.[14]

Yet Bishop, as most of the Brazilians at the time, had only a vague notion of what that "almost-bloodless revolution" really meant; her political awareness is of an inside observer. Many are the passages in Bishop's drafts for the Brazil book and in other notes probably meant for Black Beans and Diamonds that reveal her intimacy with Brazil's social and political problems.

If in "Squatter's Children" and "The Burglar of Babylon," published while Bishop was still living in Brazil, she keeps a certain decorum in her denunciation , in "Pink Dog," published after she had left, she discards decorum in favor of more vehement criticism. The last poem Bishop completed, "Pink Dog" has raised

controversial questions among critics who try to explain the poet's relationship with the grotesque figure of the female pink dog that runs the streets of Rio. For Lorrie Goldensohn, the speaker in "Pink Dog" "rises almost inevitably in our minds, moving in a ghost duet with the trotting miseries of the naked little bitch" (Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry 278). In a psychological interpretation, Bonnie Costello sees the pink dog (actually a pink bitch) and the speaker as:

> two rival aspects of the self-- one that would parade its nakedness, whatever the consequences, and one that would cover and protect, since it cannot or does not wish to expel, the body. (88)

Costello explains later on in her analysis that "the poet is not the dog but the troubled speaker who must somehow reconcile her culture to the dog it despises" (88).

Both Goldensohn's and Costello's readings of the poem seem problematic. To consider the speaker's relationship with the pink dog in terms of "a ghost duet," an association that happens "almost inevitably" in the reader's mind, is to underestimate other readings in which this sort of "supernatural" association does not occur. Costello's analysis does not clarify whose "self" is divided in "two rival aspects." If she is referring to the poet's, which seems more likely, it becomes difficult to conciliate the idea that the dog is part of this "self" and, at the same time, "the poet is not the dog."

For Schwartz, "Pink Dog" is "the most disturbing of all" of Bishop's "empathetic identifications with animals" ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 96). He does not deny the influence that

biographical data certainly had in his reading, when he affirms:

> Nowhere does Bishop--with her light skin among all the suntans, with what she calls her "scabby body and wheezing lungs" and her "dog hair," with her crippling self-consciousness (she hated photographs of herself, hated the very idea of photographs of herself) and gnawing depression, and with her subversive twinkle--suggest a more grotesque reflection of herself, the perpetual outsider. ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 96)

Whether the poet identifies herself with the pink dog or not is a question that the poem does not resolve. Two distinctive roles are linguistically established since the beginning ot the poem: the speaker's, whose voice clearly sounds in the first person, and the dog's, a passive second person, whom she addresses. Any speculation on a possible identification of the poet with the pink dog is an issue that remains "behind the scenes" of criticism, challenging whatever theory one uses to explain it. Bishop makes a wise observation in this respect in a small text entitled "It All Depends," in which she defines how far theories can get when interpreting a poem:

> No matter what theories one may have, I doubt that they are in one's mind at the moment of writing a poem or that there is even a physical possibility that they could be. Theories can only be based on interpretations of other people's poems, or one's own in retrospect, or wishful thinking. (267)

In no other poem of social denunciation has Bishop presented so grotesque a figure. Under the "blazing" sun of Rio, the pink bitch walks on the avenue causing repulsion among the passersby:

> The sun is blazing and the sky is blue.
> Umbrellas clothe the beach in every hue.
> Naked, you trot across the avenue.

> Oh, never have I seen a dog so bare!
> Naked and pink, without a single hair...
> Startled, the passersby draw back and stare.
>
> Of course they're mortally afraid of rabies.
> You are not mad; you have a case of scabies
> but look intelligent. Where are your babies?
>
> (A nursing mother, by those hanging teats.)
> In what slum have you hidden them, poor bitch,
> while you go begging, living by your wits? (190)

The "system" is severely criticized in an impersonal "they." An old rumor of how authorities used to "clean up" the slums, getting rid of pariahs like the pink dog, becomes notorious in the poem:

> Didn't you know? It's been in all the papers,
> to solve this problem, how they deal with beggars?
> They take and throw them in the tidal rivers.
>
> Yes, idiots, paralytics, parasites
> go bobbing in the ebbing sewage, nights
> out in the suburbs, where there are no lights.
>
> If they do this to anyone who begs,
> drugged, drunk, or sober, with or without legs,
> what would they do to sick, four-legged dogs?
>
> In the cafés and on the sidewalk corners
> the joke is going round that all the beggars
> who can afford them now wear life preservers. (190)

The dark humor of this passage portrays a typical Brazilian attitude, to make up jokes of the most serious national problems. "The practical, the sensible solution," says the poet, "is to wear a fantasia." With this suggestion, the poet sums up the essence of a tragic form of survival in which the only available weapon is the mask, the disguise.

> In your condition you would not be able
> even to float, much less to dog-paddle.
> Now look, the practical, the sensible

solution is to wear a fantasia.
Tonight you simply can't afford to be a-
n eyesore. But no one will ever see a

dog in máscara this time of year.
Ash Wednesday'll come but Carnival is here.
What sambas can you dance? What will you wear?

They say that Carnival's degenerating
--radios, Americans, or something,
have ruined it completely. They're just talking.

Carnival is always wonderful!
A depilated dog would not look well.
Dress up! Dress up and dance at Carnival! (190-191)

In his final analysis of "Pink Dog," Schwartz makes an important comment on the Brazilian features of the poem:

> "Pink" dogs and Carnival are still very much a part of contemporary Brazilian life. But, more important, the attitudes that Bishop expresses are more thoroughly Brazilian in this poem than anywhere else in her poetry. Bravado, unusual for Bishop, is also characteristically Brazilian-- not only bravado in the face of crisis and catastrophe but the deeper irony of bravado in the aftermath, the shadow, of crisis and catastrophe. ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 96-97)

Schwartz points out an important aspect in the development of Bishop's poetry about Brazil, i.e., the incorporation of attitudes acknowledged as "characteristically Brazilian." Among these attitudes, bravado is certainly what distinguishes "Pink Dog" from Bishop's other poems of social and political concern. The poet, who has ever kept a certain detachment or a certain decorum in her denunciations, surprises by the aggressiveness of her criticism.

## III.4 IDENTIFICATION WITH "THE OTHER"

If "Pink Dog," with its authentically Brazilian features, was the outcome of direct observation of a tragic reality, being, as it was, based on direct experience, "The Riverman" was the result of a remarkable imaginative feat. Written long before Bishop's trip to the Amazon, "The Riverman" had as primary source Charles Wagley's book, Amazon Town. In the preface to the poem, Bishop acknowledges this source and presents her characters, as well as other details in the poem, as being drawn from that source. Comparing Bishop's approach to Wagley's, Thomas J. Travisano points out a distinctive aspect between them concerning the point of view that each one presents. Travisano observes that while Amazon Town reveals the perspective of a foreigner undeniably influenced by his "assumptions of cultural superiority," Bishop's narrative adopts "the point of view of the riverman himself" (159). Further along in his analysis, Travisano states that,

> Ranging outside the European tradition, exploring the logic of an archaic culture, Bishop shows the riverman to be a figure of imagination seeking humbly but defiantly to serve his people, within a tradition wholly different from any Western model. (159)

In a fusion of dream and reality, legend and actual world, man and myth, the poet finds a symbolic passage to the world of "the other." The use of a mask in this poem, more than in any other poem about Brazil, has an integrating function promoted by the course of the action itself. The poet not only identifies with "the other,"

but, in wading into the river and being submitted to the initiation cerimony, reveals acceptance of the rituals belonging to the world of "the other."

The Dolphin, the mythical figure who enchants with his voice and with his sexual magnetism, is the first contact that the riverman has with the mysterious world of "the other:"

> I got up in the night
> for the Dolphin spoke to me.
> He grunted beneath my window,
> hid by the river mist,
> but I glimpsed him--a man like myself.
> I threw off my blanket, sweating;
> I even tore off my shirt.
> I got out of my hammock
> and went through the window naked.
> My wife slept and snored.
> Hearing the Dolphin ahead,
> I went down to the river
> and the moon was burning bright
> as the gasoline-lamp mantle
> with the flame turned up too high,
> just before it begins to scorch.
> I went down to the river.
> I heard the Dolphin sigh
> as he slid into the water.
> I stood there listening
> till he called from far outstream. (105)

The doubleness of the Dolphin--man and water spirit--reflects the doubleness of man himself between the actual world, limited by the domain of reason, and the world of imagination. Lorrie Goldensohn explains that "Like a dream, the dolphin materializes at night, when the line between forms of reality most comfortably dissolve in the mediation of sleep" (Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry 212). Taking off his clothes and leaving his wife and house behind, the riverman gets rid of everything that binds him to the real world. Nevertheless, he cannot avoid the interference of this world in his comparison: "and the moon was

burning bright / as the gasoline-lamp mantle / with the flame turned up too high..." Seduced by the Dolphin's call, the riverman looks back before plunging into the river, but he is sure of his decision:

> I waded into the river
> and suddenly a door
> in the water opened inward,
> groaning a little, with water
> bulging above the lintel.
> I looked back at my house,
> white as a piece of washing
> forgotten on the bank,
> and I thought once of my wife,
> but I knew what I was doing. (105-106)

In affirming he knew what he was doing, the riverman admits not only complicity in the Dolphin's seducing game, but voluntary acceptance of the rituals for his initiation.

> They gave me a shell of cachaça
> and decorated cigars.
> The smoke rose like mist
> through the water, and our breaths
> didn't make any bubbles.
> We drank cachaça and smoked
> the green cheroots. The room
> filled with gray-green smoke
> and my head coudn't have been dizzier.
> Then a tall, beautiful serpent
> in elegant white satin,
> with her big eyes green and gold
> like the lights on the river steamers--
> yes, Luandinha, none other--
> entered and greeted me.
> She complimented me.
> in a language I didn't know;
> but when she blew cigar smoke
> into my ears and nostrils
> I understood, like a dog,
> although I can't speak it yet.
> They showed me room after room
> and took me from here to Belém
> and back again in a minute.
> In fact, I'm not sure where I went,
> but miles, under the river. (106)

Again, in the comparison of Luandinha's eyes to "the lights on the river steamers," elements of the natural world mix up with the supernatural. Purified by Luandinha's "cigar smoke," the riverman is able to understand her language although he "can't speak it yet." It is impossible not to remember here the many references Bishop has made to the fact that she did not speak Portuguese very well in spite of living in Brazil for so long. Being interviewed by Ashley Brown in 1966, Bishop uses the same reference of the poem to explain her performance in the language: "After all these years, I'm like a dog: I understand everything that is said to me, but I don't speak it very well" ("An Interview with Elizabeth Bishop" 291).

In the next segment of the poem, the riverman brings home vestiges of his experience in the supernatural world:

> Three times now I've been there.
> I don't eat fish anymore.
> There is fine mud on my scalp
> and I know from smelling my comb
> that the river smells in my hair.
> My hands and feet are cold.
> I look yellow, my wife says,
> and she brews me stinking teas
> I throw out, behind her back.
> Every moonlight night
> I'm to go back again.
> I know some things already,
> but it will take years of study,
> it is all so difficult.
> They gave me a mottled rattle
> and a pale-green coral twig
> and some special weeds like smoke.
> (They're under my canoe.)
> When the moon shines on the river,
> oh, faster than you can think it
> we travel upstream and downstream,
> we journey from here to there,
> under the floating canoes,
> right through the wicker traps,
> when the moon shines on the river
> and Luandinha gives a party.

> Three times now I've attended.
> Her rooms shine like silver
> with the light from overhead,
> a steady stream of light
> like at the cinema. (106-107)

Although the riverman has been given the same power of mobility of the water spirits and knows "some things already," he is aware of the difficulties along the way and the seriousness of his choice. Like in previous comparisons, the riverman makes use of the familiar to explain the mysterious: "Her rooms shine like silver / ... / a steady stream of light / like at the cinema." In order to complete his initiation, the riverman has to surmount an obstacle: find a virgin mirror.

> I need a virgin mirror
> no one's ever looked at,
> that's never looked back at anyone,
> to flash up the spirits eyes
> and help me recognize them.
> The storekeeper offered me
> a box of little mirrors,
> but each time I picked one up
> a neighbor looked over my shoulder
> and then that one was spoiled--
> spoiled, that is, for anything
> but the girls to look at their mouths in,
> to examine their teeth and smiles.

Goldensohn sees the obstacle of the mirror as "exasperating images of an intervening humanity" (Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry 215). Finding a virgin mirror would be, thus, achieving a pure image, free from the interference of the human that "spoils" it. In order to integrate the community of the water spirits and become a "serious sacaca," the riverman has to surpass the limits imposed by his human condition. Sincere in his ambitiom, the riverman knows the richness hidden under the surface of the river:

Why shouldn't I be ambitious?
I sincerely desire to be
a serious sacaca
like Fortunato Pombo,
or Lúcio, or even
the great Joaquim Sacaca.
Look, it stands to reason
that everything we need
can be obtained from the river.
It drains the jungles; it draws
from trees and plants and rocks
from all around the world,
it draws from the very heart
of the earth the remedy
for each of the diseases--
one just has to know how to find it.
But everything must be there
in that magic mud, beneath
the multitudes of fish,
deadly and innocent,
the giant pirarucús,
the turtles and crocodiles,
tree trunks and sunk canoes,
with the crayfish, with the worms
with tiny electric eyes
turning on and off and on.
The river breathes in salt
and breathes it out again,
and all is sweeetness there
in the deep, enchanted silt.

Goldensohn believes that there is in this passage a possible attempt "to rationalize magic, to make a stand at imitating a primitive reasoning process, as if that process was a prelogical and prescientific mode for manipulating environment" (Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry 217). Once more the poet interweaves the world of reason with the world of dream or imagination. "... everything must be there / in that magic mud..." to satisfy either human or spiritual needs. Already in possession of the water spirits' power of motion, the riverman travels "fast as a wish," like Shakespeare's Puck, "swifter than arrow from the Tarta's bow."

When the moon burns white
and the river makes that sound
like a primus pumped up high--
that fast, high whispering
like a hundred people at once--
I'll be there below,
as the turtle rattle hisses
and the coral gives the sign,
travelling fast as a wish,
with my magic cloak of fish
swerving as I swerve,
following the veins,
the river's long, long veins,
to find the pure elixirs.
Godfathers and cousins,
your canoes are over my head;
I hear your voices talking.
You can peer down and down
or dredge the river buttom
but never, never catch me.
When the moon shines and the river
lies across the earth
and sucks it like a child,
then I will go to work
to get you health and money.
The Dolphin singled me out;
Luandinha seconded it.

This final opposition showing the riverman immersed and the "Godfathers and cousins" on the surface demonstrates how far the process of identification with "the other" has driven the poet. "They can peer down and down / or dredge the river bottom / but never, never catch me," says the poet, finally "a believer in total immersion." What undoubtedly distinguishes the poet from her "godfathers and cousins" is her choice of not remaining in the surface, but immersing into the culture of "the other."

In the same interview with Ashley Brown, after talking about her difficulties with the Portuguese language, Bishop submits,

> Living in the way I have happened to live here, knowing Brazilians, has made a great difference. The general life I have known here has of course had an impact on me. I think I've learned a great deal.

> Most New York intellectuals' ideas about "underdeveloped coutries" are partly mistaken, and living among people of a completely different culture has changed a lot of my old stereotyped ideas. ("An Interview with Elizabeth Bishop" 290)

To observe the development of Bishop's poetry since her first impressions of Brasil in "Arrival at Santos" up to her symbolic identification with the mythical figure of the riverman is to follow her own process of immersion into the world of "the other." Two positions are of significant importance in this process: the domestic, concerning the poet's relationship with her private world or a particularly domestic Brazil, and the outer world. Even occupying a brief space in Bishop's poetry, the domestic demonstrates the first evidences of familiarity with the world of "the other." While the domestic suggests an atmosphere of tranquility, the outer world is predominantly its antithesis. Excepting "Manuelzinho" and "The Riverman," the other poems in this chapter have focused on conflicting situations generated by social and political problems. These poems not only reflect the poet's long exposure to Brazilian problems, but also reveal her intimacy with them. The poet, who had preferred the detachment of a third person narration in "Squatter's Children," or the lens of her binoculars in "The Burglar of Babylon," ends up admitting her personal testimony in "Brazil, 1959" and "Pink Dog." This movement toward the personal gains deeper dimensions in "The Riverman." No longer the mere personal witness, the poet, through the mask, becomes the protagonist of her own monologue, in a symbolic attitude of acceptance of the identity of "the other."

The set of poems published after the publication of Questions of Travel reveal a new feature of the poet's relationship with the world of "the other," marked mainly by moments of anxiety and conflict. Schwartz compares these poems to Shakespeare's dark comedies--"both funny and bitter" ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 94). The dramatic monologue, already present in "The Riverman," gains a new poetic form with the prose poem "Rainy Season Sub-Tropics," and scenes of the ordinary become the expression of the disturbing familiar.

## NOTES

[1] This manuscript refers to Bishop's trip down the Rio São Francisco in 1967 aboard an old stern-wheeler, the Wenceslau Braz. Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Series Prose, Box 27, Folder 384.

[2] Elizabeth Bishop, letter to Robert Lowell, 7 June 1956, Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Folder 9.

[3] The same reference to 'columns of staggerring zeros' is present in Bishop's essay "Primer Class," in which she records her early school days. Elizabeth Bishop, The Collected Prose (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984) 3-4.

[4] Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Series Poetry, Box 29, Folder 434.

[5] This passage is taken from Bishop's manuscripts. The decision of using Bishop's drafts instead of the official version of the book is due to the fact of the originals having been extensively edited by the publishers. Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Series Brazil, Box 36, Folder 583.

[6] During a meeting at Harvard University, Dr. Vendler reiterated the validity of this assumption. Helen Vendler, personal interview, 19 February 1992.

[7] Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Series Fragments, Box 35, Folder 573

[8] Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Series Fragments, Box 35, Folder 569.

[9] Elizabeth Bishop, letter to Robert Lowell, 8 July 1955, Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Folder 8

[10] Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Series Poetry, Box 33, Folder 505.

[11] Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Series Brazil, Box 36, Folder 574.

[12] Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Series Brazil, Box 36, Folder 581.

[13] Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library Poughkeepsie, Series Poetry, Box 32, Folder 499.

[14] Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Series Brazil, Box 36, Folder 583.

# CHAPTER IV

# THE CONFLICT WITH THE FAMILIAR AND THE ADOPTION OF THE MASK

Bishop's last poems about Brazil while she was still living in the country were published in the late 1960s and have never belonged to a single volume. Gathered under the tittle of "Uncollected Work," between "Questions of Travel" and "Geography III" in the Complete Poems, they seem to bear the same sense of displacement that involves the strange creatures of "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics," the first poem within this series. According to Lloyd Schwartz, these prose poems "show how painful and unsettled Bishop's life in Brazil had become and reflect her indecisiveness about whether to return to America or remain in Brazil" ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 94). Behind the mask of the "strayed crab," the poet "obliquely" reveals this conflict: "This is not my home. How did I get so far from water?" (140) More and more the use of a mask becomes the ideal poetic disguise for a poet who has never hidden her distaste for confessional poetry. This preference for "the oblique, the indirect approach" (140) is what must have determined Bishop's decision to keep some personal poems "in the drawer," i. e., unpublished. Although without a clear reference to the time it was written, one of these unpublished poems is intimately related to this period of conflict. Addressed to Marianne Moore and Robert Lowell, "Letter to Two Friends" seems to be the poem which has

generated the characters of "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics."

> Heavens! It's raining again
> and
> and the "view"
> is now two weeks overdue
> and the road is impassable
> and after shaking his paws
> the cat retires in disgust
> to the highest closet shelf,
> and the dogs smell awfully like dogs,
> and I'm sick of myself,
> and sometime during the night
> the poem I was trying to write
> has turned into prepositions:
> ins and aboves and upons
>
> What am I trying to do?
> Change places in a canoe?
> method of composition
>
> The toucan is very annoyed.
> Uncle Sam! Sammy! Shut up!
> He stands up straight in his cage
> with his bright blue eyes aglare
> and shrieks in a perfect rage
> his tough blue feet
> Maria do Carmo, please,
> give him a piece of raw meat

The rain, which in "Electrical Storm" and "Song for the Rainy Season has previously appeared linked to the idea of warmth, here causes uneasiness: "Heavens! It's raining again..." Even the cat, which in "Electrical Storm" stayed in the warm sheets, here "retires in disgust / to the highest closet shelf." Probably influenced by the straightforward way in which Latin Americans are said to express their emotions, the poet betrays her Northern reticence and confesses: "I'm sick of myself." Like the cat Tobias, the toucan is another Brazilian pet immortalized in an unpublished poem bearing his name--"Sammy"--that Bishop wrote on the occasion of the bird's death. The first lines of this poem show at the same

time a bitter and a comic tone which Schwartz identifies as characteristic of Bishop's poetry in this period: "Most comical of all in death, / Sammy, dear Uncle Sam, / dead these fifteen years..."[2]

In the next segment of "Letter to Two Friends" the poet, who is in conflict even with her own poetry, makes a dramatic appeal to her closest poet friends:

> Marianne, loan me a noun!
> Cal, please cable a verb!
> Or simply propulse through the ether
> some more powerful meter
>
> The radio battery is dead,
> for all I know, so is Dulles
>
> the toads as big as your hat
> that want to come in the house
> and mournfully sit at the door
> spotted, round-shouldered, and wet
> with enourmous masochist eyes,
> the biggest snail seen yet
> moving mysteriously to his fate
>
> like a melting white, dinner-plate,
> left over from a <u>seance</u>
> with his brown, glazed house on his back
> with no gift for languages
> and even less for gesture
> exchange anxiety
> with a visa about to expire,
> with a car with one good tire[1]

The similarity in the description of the giant toad and the giant snail in "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics" does not leave any doubt regarding the origin of the characters. Projecting her own conflicts in the figure of the snail, at the end of the poem, the poet triggers a more sophisticated process of identification that results in the adoption of the mask in the dramatic monologue. The same reference to Bishop's difficulty with the Portuguese language

suggested in "The Riverman" appears in the poet's identification with the snail: "with no gift for languages." The last two lines of the poem are typical of Bishop's extraordinary ability to use the trivial to suggest her deepest reflections. The notions of "a visa about to expire" and "a car with one good tire" sum up the poet's most immediate concerns: whether or not to remain in Brazil and her economic situation.

"Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics," the only prose-poem Bishop has written along her career, significantly comes about in a turning point of her poetry. As Bishop frees herself from the limitations imposed by the poetic line, she, for the first time, makes use of a mask to express her own conflicts. The poet, who had already experienced speaking through different personae in "Manuelzinho" and in "The Riverman" to develop the dramatic monologue, here definitively incorporates the mask to her poetry as the ideal way of making revelations about herself without exactly being confessional.

The giant toad "with enourmous masoquist eyes" is the first of the three rain-creatures to be given voice in "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics:"

> I am too big, too big by far. Pity me.
> My eyes bulge and hurt. They are my one great beauty, even so. They see too much, above, below, and yet there is not much to see. The rain has stopped. The mist is gathering on my skin in drops. The drops run down on my back, run from the corners of my downturned mouth, run down my sides and drip beneath my belly. Perhaps the droplets on my mottled hide are pretty, like dewdrops, silver on a moldering leaf? They chill me through and through. I feel my colors changing now, my pigments gradually shudder and shift over.
> Now I shall get beneath that overhanging ledge. Slowly. Hop. Two or three times more, silently. That

> was too far. I'm standing up. The lichen's gray, and rough to my front feet. Get down. Turn facing out, it's safer. Don't breathe until the snail gets by. But we go travelling the same weathers.
>
> Swallow the air and mouthfuls of cold mist. Give voice, just once. O how it echoed from the rock! What a profound, angelic bell I rang!
>
> I live, I breathe, by swallowing. Once, some naughty children picked me up, me and two brothers. They set us down again somewhere and in our mouths they put lit cigarettes. We could not help but smoke them, to the end. I thought it was the death of me, but when I was entirely filled with smoke, when my slack mouth was burning, and all my tripes were hot and dry, they let us go. But I was sick for days.
>
> I have big shoulders, like a boxer. They are not muscle, however, and their color is dark. They are my sacs of poison, the almost unused poison that I bear, my burden and my great responsibility. Big wings of poison, folded on my back. Beware,I am an angel in disguise; my wings are evil, but not deadly. If I will it, the poison could break through, blue-black, and dangerous to all. Blue-black fumes would rise upon the air. Beware, you frivolous crab. (139)

"My eyes bulge and hurt," complains the toad, "They are my one great beauty, even so." Pain and pleasure are paradoxically attributed to the gift of perception. Frank Bidart declares that "the greatest triumph" in Bishop's descriptions is "the drama of perception lying beneath [her descriptions] and enacted by them, her sense of the cost as well as pleasures of such observing" (214). The lines that separate merely descriptive passages from revelations about the poet's self are so subtle in this poem that sometimes it becomes impossible to distinguish them. Although some references to the poet's self are quite evident and easily deciphered, others will always be "suspended," like the toad's final discourse on his sacks of poison.[3] This ability to interweave the apparent and the deep, the natural and the mysterious is what makes of Bishop's poetry an endless search for

meaning. Coincidently, "spontaneity," in the sense of "sounding natural," and "mystery" are qualities that Bishop has ever admired in her favorite poets--Herbert, Hopkins, and Baudelaire.[4]

In the voice of the "stayed crab," the poet makes significant considerations about her own vision of poetry:

> This is not my home. How did I get so far from water? It must be over that way somewhere.
>
> I am the color of wine, of tinta. The inside of my powerful right claw is saffron-yellow. See, I see it now; I wave it like a flag. I am dapper and elegant; I move with great precision, cleverly managing all my smaller yellow claws. I believe in the oblique, the indirect approach, and keep my feelings to myself.
>
> But on this strange, smooth surface I am making too much noise. I wasn't meant for this. If I maneuver a bit and keep a sharp lookout, I shall find my pool again. Watch out for my right claw, all passersby! This place is too hard. The rain has stopped, and it is damp, but still not wet enough to please me.
>
> My eyes are good, though small; my shell is tough and tight. In my own pool are many small gray fish. I see right through them. Only their large eyes are opaque, and twitch at me. They are hard to catch, but I, I catch them quickly in my arms and eat them up.
>
> What is that big soft monster, like a yellow cloud, stifling and warm? What is it doing? It pats my back. Out, claw. There, I have freightened it away. It's sitting down, pretending nothing's happened. I'll skirt it. It's still pretending not to see me. Out of my way, O monster. I own a pool, all the little fish swim in it, and all the skittering waterbugs that smell like rotten apples.
>
> Cheer up, O grievous snail. I tap your shell, encouragingly, not that you will ever know about it.
>
> And I want nothing to do with you, either, sulking toad. Imagine, at least four times my size and yet so vulnerable... I could open your belly with my claw. You glare and bulge, a watchdog near my pool; you make a loud and hollow noise. I do not care for such stupidity. I admire compression, lightness, and agility, all rare in this loose world. (140)

The crab's remark--"I believe in the oblique, the indirect approach, and I keep my feelings to myself"--immediately brings to one's mind Bishop's famous criticism on confessional poetry. In its conclusion, she says: "The tendency is to overdo the morbidity. You just wish they'd keep some of these things to themselves" (qtd. in Schwartz Elizabeth Bishop and Her Art 303). The final statement--"I admire compression, lightness, and agility..."--also has much in common with Bishop's own poetry.

While the first lines of the toad's monologue suggests the drama caused by the disproportion of a "too big" self, the beginning of the crab's monologue clearly expresses the drama of displacement. Like the toad, the snail carries the burden of her own self:

> The rain has stopped. The waterfall will roar like that all night. I have come out to take a walk and feed. My body--foot, that is--is wet and cold and covered with sharp gravel. It is white, the size of a dinner plate. I have set myself a goal, a certain rock, but it may well be dawn before I get there. Although I move ghostlike and my floating edges barerly graze the ground, I am heavy, heavy, heavy. My white muscles are already tired. I give the impression of mysterious ease, but it is only with the greatest effort of my will that I can rise above the smallest stones and sticks. And I must not let myself be distracted by those rough spears of grass. Don't touch them. Draw back. Withdrawal is always best.
>
> The rain has stopped. The waterfall makes such a noise! (And what if I fall over it?) The mountains of black rock give off such clouds of steam! Shiny streamers are hanging down their sides. When this occurs, we have a saying that the Snail Gods have come down in haste. I could never descend such steep escarpments, much less dream of climbing them.
>
> That toad was too big, too, like me. His eyes beseeched my love. Our proportions horrify our neighbors.
>
> Rest a minute; relax. Flattened to the ground, my body is like a pallid, decomposing leaf. What's the tapping on my shell? Nothing. Let's go on.

> My sides move in rhythmic waves, just off the ground, from front to back, the wake of a ship, wax-white water, or a slowly melting floe. I am cold, cold, cold as ice. My blind, white bull's head was a Cretan scare-head; degenerate, my four horns that can't attack. The sides of my mouth are now my hands. They press the earth and suck it hard. Ah, but I know my shell is beautiful, and high, and glazed, and shining. I know it well, although I have not seen it. Its curled white lips is of the finest enamel. Inside, it is as smooth as silk, and I, I fill it to perfection.
>
> My wide wake shines, now it is growing dark. I leave a lovely opalescent ribbon: I know this.
>
> But O! I am too big. I feel it. Pity me. (141)

It is interesting to observe how the poet reacts to the sounds of the waterfalls in "Song for the Rainy Season" and in this monologue. The "familiar" becomes disturbing: "The waterfall will roar like that all night... The waterfall makes such a noise!" In contrast to the crab, who is proud of his "lightness" and "agility," the snail complains of the weight he has to bear: "I am heavy, heavy, heavy... I give the impression of mysterious ease, but it is only with the greatest effort of my will that I can rise above the smallest stones and sticks." This passage seems to sum up the drama of an entire existence which has ever required a lot of effort and persistence. Like the "little women" in retreat in "Brazil, January 1, 1502" and in Lispector's "The Smallest Woman in the World," "withdrawal" is a way of enduring. Ashley Brown compares Bishop's strange creatures to Beckett's characters "in urns up to their necks, each lit in turn by a spotlight as he blames the others for his plight" ("Elizabeth Bishop in Brazil" 226). She observes that the same expression "Pity me" that appears in both the toad's and the snail's monologues also happens in Beckett's play. Like Beckett behind the mask of his creatures,

Bishop exposes her most intimate conflicts and registers moments of deep reflections.

If, in "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics" the conflict with the familiar is still very subtle, in "Going to the Bakery" it becomes more visible. Comparing this poem to "Under the Window: Ouro Preto", Schwartz states that it presents "a lively but even more relentless image of malaise. Rio seems mortally ill" ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 95). No other image of the ordinary could better portray the routine of this "mortally ill" Rio than the one of the run-down bakery. Whatever there is to be sold in the bakery looks deteriorated:

> Instead of gazing at the sea
> the way she does on other nights,
> the moon looks down the Avenida
> Copacabana at the sights,
>
> new to her but ordinary.
> She leans on the slack trolley wires.
> Below, the tracks slither between
> lines of head-to-tail parked cars.
>
> (The tin hides have the iridescence
> of dying, flaccid toy ballons.)
> The tracks end in a puddle of mercury;
> the wires, at the moon's
>
> magnetic instances, take off
> to snarl in distant nebulae.
> The bakery lights are dim. Beneath
> our rationed electricity,
>
> the round cakes look about to faint--
> each turns up a glazed white eye.
> The gooey tarts are red and sore.
> Buy, buy, what shall I buy?
>
> Now flour is adulterated
> with cornmeal, the loaves of bread
> lie like yellow-fever victims
> laid out in a crowded ward.
>
> The baker; sickly too, suggests
> the "milk rolls," since they still are warm

and made with milk, he says. They feel
like a baby on the arm. (151)

More than only familiarized with the everyday life in Rio, the poet significantly includes herself in this reality when she refers to "our rationed electricity" (italics mine). The personification of "cakes" and "loaves of bread," as victims, seems to be an ironic transference of what indeed hits people. With a certain saturation in face of the routine, the poet questions herself: "Buy, buy, what shall I buy?" From the interior of the bakery, the poet shifts the focus to the street where she spots two real victims:

Under the false-almond tree's
leathery leaves, a childish puta
dances, feverish as an atom:
chá-cha, chá-cha, chá-cha....

In front of my apartment house
a black man sits in a black shade,
lifting his shirt to show a bandage
on his black, invisible side.

Fumes of cachaça knock me over,
like gas fumes from an auto-crash.
He speaks in perfect gibberish.
The bandage glares up, white and fresh.

I give him seven cents in my
terrific money, say "Good night"
from force of habit. Oh, mean habit!
Not one word more apt or bright? (152)

Schwartz observes that in the first stanza of this segment "Bishop delights in the rhymes and wallows in the language of decay" ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 95). Unusual for Bishop's Northern standards, the inclusion of this kind of language in her poetry also seems to be some sort of Latin American inheritance. It is curious to observe how close the poet is to the reality she depicts. No longer the detached speaker of "Squatter's Children"

and "The Burglar of Babylon," the poet approaches the black man and gives him "seven cents" in her "terrific money." The irony implied in this expression shows that indeed her "terrific money" could do nothing to change this painful situation. "Oh, mean habit!," exclaims the poet, referring to the meaningless "good night" she says to the beggar; "Not one word more apt or bright?", she concludes. Even words are worthless. Human degradation so realistically presented here can only be compared to the one in "Pink Dog." Both the bitter tone of "Going to the Bakery" and the dark humor of "Pink Dog" reflect a sense of impotence in face of a dramatic reality. Neither the dramatic solution of wearing a "fantasia" nor the "mean" attitude of giving alms resolve the human drama expressed in these poems.

Unlike the other poems of this chapter, all marked by some sort of conflict, "Under the Window: Ouro Preto" seems to have no other concern but the prosaic description of scenes of the ordinary:

> The conversations are simple: about food,
> or, "When my mother combs my hair it hurts."
> "Women." "Women!" Women in red dresses
>
> and plastic sandals, carrying their almost
> invisible babies--muffled to the eyes
> in all the heat--unwrap them, lower them,
>
> and give them drinks of water lovingly
> from dirty hands, here where there used to be
> a fountain, here where all the world still stops.
>
> The water used to run out the mouths
> of three green soapstone faces. (One faced laughed
> and one face cried; the middle one just looked.
>
> Patched up with plaster, they're in the museum.)
> It runs now from a single iron pipe,
> a strong and ropy stream. "Cold." "Cold as ice,"

all have agreed for several centuries.
Donkeys agree, and dogs, and the neat little
bottle-green swallows dare to dip and taste.

Here comes that old man with the stick and sack,
meandering again. He stops and fumbles.
He finally gets out his enamelled mug.

Here comes some laundry tied up in a sheet,
all on its own, three feet above the ground.
Oh, no--a small black boy is underneath.

Six donkeys come behind their "grandmother"
--the one who wears a fringe of orange wool
with wooly balls above her eyes, and bells.

They veer toward the water as a matter
of course, until the drover's mare trots up,
her whiplash-blinded eye on the off side. (153-154)

Women carrying their babies, donkeys, dogs were images that Bishop was very much used to observing from the window of her house in Ouro Preto. Years after the poem's publication, Bishop writes to Mariette Charlton: "... window-leaning is the favorite sport--hours go by that way, and any little incident like a new doorway gathers a steady crowd of ten or so..." And, in this crowd, Bishop includes the characters of her poem: "a few burros, dogs, and many infants in arms."[5] Although the poet does not include herself in the narrative of the poem, as she does in "Going to the Bakery," and keeps a certain detachment imposed by the limits of her window, her familiarity with the scene is undeniable: "Here comes that old man with the stick and sack, / meandering again..." The domestic, predominantly negative and disturbing in this set of poems, has here its brief moment of humor: "Here comes some laundry tied up in a sheet, / all on its own, three feet above the ground. / Oh, no--a small black boy is underneath." But soon the lightness of the scene is broken by the arrival of newcomers:

A big new truck, Mercedes-Benz, arrives
to overawe them all. The body's painted
with throbbing rosebuds and the bumper says

HERE AM I FOR WHOM YOU HAVE BEEN WAITING.
The driver and assistant driver wash
their faces, necks, and chests. They wash their feet,

their shoes, and put them back together again.
Meanwhile, another, older truck grinds up
in a blue cloud of burning oil. It has

a syphilitic nose. Nevertheless,
its gallant driver tells the passersby
NOT MUCH MONEY BUT IT IS AMUSING.

"She's been in labor now two days." "Transistors
cost much too much." "For lunch we took advantage
of the poor duck the dog decapitated."

The seven ages of man are talkative
and soiled and thirsty. (154)

The grotesque that subtly appears in the image of the truck drivers publicly washing parts of their bodies becomes more evident in their language: "For lunch we took advantage / of the poor duck the dog decapitated." Here the grotesque mixes up with the idea of backwardness and carelessness about the environment: "Meanwhile, another older truck grinds up / in a blue cloud of burning oil." The final scene with "the ditch of standing water" being polluted by oil is, for Schwartz, an image of "destruction and fragmentation" ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 95):

Oil has seeped into
the margins of the ditch of standing water

and flashes or looks upward brokenly,
like bits of mirror--no, more blue than that:
like tatters of the Morpho butterfly. (154)

However the poem impresses more for the liveliness of its descriptions than for its final image of "destruction and fragmentation," these two aspects are equally determinant in the

ambivalence of the vision of the familiar. At the same time that the familiar gives the impression of "mysterious ease," it brings a certain sense of discomfort caused by the presence of the grotesque and by the vision of destruction.

"Under the Window: Ouro Preto" was one of the few poems that Bishop managed to write in this period of conflict. In a letter to Lowell, she expresses this difficulty:

> I am touched by the 'reading' of my poem... My only poem in a year or more. Well, it is nice of you to like it; it certainly couldn't be much simpler. I hung out that window by the hour it was written a year ago last October...[6]

If the late 1960s marked a period of conflict in Bishop's poetry, it also represented a period of growth. (Significant changes have ever been connected to periods of conflict). The use of a mask becomes, in "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics," an effective tool in the poet's skilfull hands--the perfect "oblique" expression of her most intimate conflicts. This experience is certainly decisive in the later creation of "Crusoe in England," the mask which most impressively reflects the drama of the poet's life. Either depicting the "sick" side of the routine in Rio or the dull life in Ouro Preto, Bishop's images of the ordinary gain more authenticity as they reveal the poet's deep familiarity with them.

Brazil, apparently absent in Geography III, reappears, in 1978, in the poem "Santarém," a poetic reconstruction of Bishop's trip down the Amazon in 1961.

# NOTES

[1] Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Series Poetry, Box 33, Folder 512.

[2] Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Series Poetry, Box 34, Folder 557.

[3] Bishop makes a reference to this subject in a two-page note in which she quotes passages by her favorite poets and discusses poetry. Some of these considerations were later incorporated to Bishop's famous essay "It All Depends." Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Series Fragments, Box 35, Folder 570.

[4] Elizabeth Bishop, unpublished letter to Mariette Charlton, 24 July 1969, Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Folder 6.

[5] Elizabeth Bishop, unpublished letter to Robert Lowell, 3 March 1967, Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Folder 19.

# CHAPTER V

# THE POETIC RECONSTRUCTION OF WHAT HAS BEEN LOST

Before moving to "Santarém," the poem which next to "Pink Dog" is the last account of Brazil in Bishop's poetry, it is worth investigating what happens to Brazil in Geography III, Bishop's last published volume of poetry.

The "absence" of Brazilian material in Geography III, which Lorrie Goldensohn recognizes as "a late mark of the definitive end" of Bishop's life in the country (Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry 233), is questionable. Because there is no explicit reference to Brazil in "Crusoe in England," "One Art," and "Five Flights Up," can one jump to the conclusion that Brazil is absent in these poems?

Published in 1971, a few years before Bishop's definitive move to Boston, "Crusoe in England" has undeniable links with her experience in Brazil. In the mid-1960s, Bishop writes to Lowell:

> I rarely try to work at night but last night I worked away at a poem about Robinson Crusoe until after two... Partly the effects of one vacation and partly the promise of another.[1]

The former vacation that Bishop refers to was her recent trip to England, a detail that possibly justifies the choice of the poem's title.

The passage of the poem which more clearly reveals the presence of Brazil is undoubtedly Crusoe's monologue about his nightmares:

> ... I'd have
> nightmares of other islands
> stretching away from mine, infinities
> of islands, islands spawning islands,
> like frogs' eggs turning into polliwogs
> of islands, knowing that I had to live
> on each and every one, eventually,
> for ages, registering their flora,
> their fauna, their geography. (165)

In regard to this passage, Robert Dale Parker observes that, like Crusoe, Bishop "has traveled from one land and island to another, registering in her poems, stories, and letters their life and ladscape" (133-134). Among all the places Bishop has traveled to, Brazil is certainly the "island" which has deserved the majority of these registers. Further along in his commentary, Parker points out two other links between the poem and Bishop's personal experience in Brazil:

> When she writes "Crusoe in England" she, like Crusoe, after many years in the south and away from her homeland, has returned to the north where she grew up (Boston), has lost someone from her faraway land whom she loved dearly, and, late in life, looks back over her past. It all makes an elaborate subterfuge, lighter and more comic in the guise of the fictional Crusoe than it probably would be in her own voice. (134)

Referring to Bishop's loss of "someone from the faraway land whom she loved dearly," Parker clearly suggests the connection between Lota and the character "Friday," who in the poem suggestively appears as a male character:

> Just when I thought I couldn't stand it
> another minute longer, Friday came.
> (Accounts of that have everything all wrong.)
> Friday was nice.
> Friday was nice, and we were friends.
> If he only had been a woman!
> I wanted to propagate my kind,
> and so did he, I think, poor boy.
> He'd pet the baby goats sometimes,
> and race with them, or carry one around.
> --Pretty to watch; he had a pretty body.
>
> And then one day they came and took us off. (166)

Similarities between this poetic account and real facts of Bishop's life in Brazil in the company of Lota are undeniable. All biographic accounts indicate that Lota really "came" in a moment when Bishop 'couldn't stand it another minute longer.' Meeting Lota and starting a new life in Brazil was for Bishop the end of a long period of solitude, as already mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation. "Friday makes things bearable, even if procriation is impossible," observes Thomas J. Travisano, considering the analogy with Lota "transparent" (182). The lightness of the final expression "--And Friday, my dear Friday, died of measles" seems an ironic reverse of what Lota's tragic death has actually represented. Among other ironies in "Crusoe in England," this one could be considered, as Lloyd Schwartz proposes, "the way one may become nostalgic about what was essentially painful" ("'One Art': The Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop, 1971-1976" 140). Both Friday and Lota have had accidental deaths.

In "Crusoe in England," once more the use of a mask proves to be an effective poetic device (or disguise) for the poet to reveal her own conflicts. Creating a fiction becomes an "oblique" way of saying personal truths, without taking the risk of being

"confessional." One of Bishop's most elaborate masks, Crusoe is also the one which most impressively identifies with her own story.

Comparing this dramatic monologue with "One Art," Schwartz observes that the fiction of Crusoe may have allowed Bishop "to say something that is true of herself because she has already said it is true of someone else" ("'One Art': The Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop, 1971-1976" 139). Schwartz sees "Crusoe's final stoical reticence at his loss of Friday" as a paradigm for the loss of a person, expressed in the final stanza of "One Art."

Whether or not the poet refers to the loss of the same person in "Crusoe in England" and "One Art" has been a polemic issue which has been discussed mainly in the light of biographical data. Because of consistent evidences of Bishop's personal identification with these two poems and of the impact that the loss of Lota had in her life, the tendency among critics is to consider the allusion in both poems to Lota.[2] In regard to the final stanza of "One Art," Schwartz believes that the allusion is not to Lota, but to "a later relationship." Nevertheless, he recognizes the poem to be "surely informed" by Bishop's loss of Lota and of Brazil ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 95).[3] If the allusion to Lota is questionable, Bishop's reference to Brazil in the lines below is irrefutable:

> ... And look! my last, or
> next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
> The art of losing isn't hard to master.
>
> I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
> some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
> I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster. (178)

"Samambaia," the "ultra-modern house up on the side of a black granite mountain"[4] in Petrópolis, and "Casa Mariana," the

seventeen-century house in Ouro Preto, are certainly among the "three loved houses" that "went." The precision of the reference to "two rivers" (italics mine) significantly reappears in the poem "Santarém:"

> That golden evening I really wanted to go no farther;
> more than anything else I wanted to stay awhile
> in that conflux of two great rivers, Tapajós, Amazon,
> grandly, silently flowing, flowing east.
> ...
> Two rivers. Hadn't two rivers sprung
> from the Garden of Eden? No, that was four
> and they'd diverged. Here only two
> and coming together... (185)

The poet, who "more than anything else... wanted to stay awhile in that conflux" of the two rivers, "couldn't stay." The ship's whistle called her back to her trip and the "two great rivers" were left behind. Irreversibly lost in "One Art," these two rivers spring in the poetic reconstruction of that long ago "golden evening."

While Bishop's loss of Brazil is physically expressed in "One Art"--two of the "three loved houses" that "went," "two rivers, a continent"--in "Five Flights Up" it is implied as part of an abstract "yesterday:" "--Yesterday brought to today so lightly! / (A yesterday I find almost impossible to lift.)" (181)

As it is possible to observe, the supposed absense of Brazil in Geography III is only apparent. Since "Arrival at Santos," the first poetic account of Bishop's arrival in the country, Brazil has occupied a period of almost three decades in her poetry. Bishop's meticulous re-creation of an impressively "alive" Brazil in "Santarém" ("after, after--how many years?") is, perhaps, the most convincing testimony of how present Brazil has been along the

course of her poetry.

> Of course I may be remembering it all wrong
> after, after--how many years?
>
> That golden evening I really wanted to go no farther;
> more than anything else I wanted to stay awhile
> in that conflux of the two great rivers, Tapajós, Amazon,
> grandly, silently flowing, flowing east.
> Suddenly there'd been houses, people, and lots of mongrel
> riverboats skittering back and forth
> under a sky of gorgeous, under-lit clouds,
> with everything gilded, burnished along one side,
> and everything bright, cheerful, casual--or so it looked.
> I liked the place; I liked the idea of the place.
> Two rivers. Hadn't two rivers sprung
> from the Garden of Eden? No, that was four
> and they'd diverged. Here only two
> and coming together. Even if one were tempted
> to literary interpretations
> such as: life / death, right / wrong, male / female
> --such notions would have resolved, dissolved, straight
> off
> in that watery, dazzingly dialectic. (185)

After having long mastered the use of the mask as the perfect poetic disguise for her own "self," the poet surprisingly abandons it at the end of her career definitively to adopt the habit of speaking in her own voice. The opening of "Santarém" clearly reveals this move toward the personal. In the conversational tone of the first two lines of the poem, the poet records the immediacy of her own act of remembering: "Of course I may be remembering it all wrong / after, after--how many years?" The image of the rivers-- Tapajós and Amazon--is the first one to come to the poet's mind. As the rivers flow in the memory of that "golden evening," other images are put into motion: "Suddenly there'd been houses, people and lots of mongrel / riverboats skittering back and forth..." In the mystery of "that dazzingly dialectic" of the two rivers flowing side by side and, even so, keeping their own

characteristics, all notions of difference seems to "dissolve." well-known variety of tones found in the Amazon rivers is somet that impresses any visitor. In a letter to Lota, Bishop addre this subject, describing not the conflux of the Tapajós and Amazon, but the Rio Negro and the Amazon:

> The Rio Negro is very wide here--about a mile and a half, I'd guess and the water <u>is</u> black, but clear--a little like those dark brown diamonds they call black diamonds. Just below Manaus it is joined by the Salamão (sic)--and that's where the "Amazon" really begins. That river is like weak <u>café com leite</u> and where they join--and they do join--they don't mix if you can figure that out--the clear water and the cloudy water just seem to stay there, side by side.[5]

In the next stanza, the poet's memory moves from "water" to "land," as she describes the town life and the features of the place:

> In front of the church, the Cathedral, rather,
> there was a modest promenade and a belvedere
> about to fall into the river,
> stubby palms, flamboyants like pans of embers,
> buildings one story high, stucco, blue or yellow,
> and one house faced with azulejos, buttercup yellow.
> The street was deep in dark-gold river sand
> damp from the ritual afternoon rain,
> and teams of zebus plodded, gentle, proud,
> and blue, with down-curved horns and hanging ears,
> pulling carts with solid wheels.
> The zebus' hooves, the people's feet
> waded in golden sand,
> dampered by golden sand,
> so that almost the only sounds
> were creaks and shush, shush, shush. (185-186)

What in the previous stanza seems to be a sort of visual "cliché"--the "golden" tone of the evening--here becomes part of a

filtered from memory. Like in a water-color, the "yellow" tone of the buildings or the "buttercup yellow" of the "azulejos" match the "dark-gold" or the "golden" tone of the sand. Goldensohn aptly observes that "if longing, unslaked, but full of resigned acceptance, has a color it is probably the gold of 'Santarém'" (Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry 272).

The poet's memory again turns to the two rivers and the permanent flow of people "embarking" and "disembarking:"

> Two rivers full of crazy shipping--people
> all apparently changing their minds, embarking,
> disembarking, rowing clumsy dories.
> (After the Civil War some Southern families
> came here; here they could still own slaves.
> They left occasional blue eyes, English names,
> and oars. No other place, no one
> on all the Amazon's four thousand miles
> does anything but paddle.)
> A dozen or so young nuns, white-habited,
> waved gaily from an old stern-wheeler
> getting up steam, already hung with hammocks
> --off to their mission, days and days away
> up God knows what lost tributary.
> Side-wheelers, countless wobbling dugouts...
> A cow stood up in one, quite calm,
> chewing her cud while being ferried,
> tipping, wobbling, somewhere, to be married.
> A river schooner with raked masts
> and violet-colored sails tacked in so close
> her bowsprit seemed to touch the church (186)

The reference to "occasional blue eyes, English names / and oars," traces of another culture, so naturally integrated in that scenery, brings back the notion of "doubleness" that formerly appears connected to the rivers. Side by side like the two rivers, the two cultures do not mix up; each one keeps its own features, its own identity. The complete absence of any pattern in the disposition of images along the course of the narrative brings about curious transitions as the one from the nuns to the cow

calmly "chewing her cud while being ferried, / tipping, wobbling, somewhere, to be married." Once more, following the immediacy of her thoughts, the poet reiterates a previous correction: "her bowsprit seemed to touch the church / (Cathedral, rather!)." And, with the same easiness in which images come to her mind, the poet goes back to "land" to narrate a side event ("a miracle, rather."):

> ... A week or so before
> there'd been a thunderstorm and the Cathedral'd
> been struck by lightning. One tower had
> a widening zigzag crack all the way down.
> It was a miracle. The priest's house right next door
> had been struck, too, and his brass bed
> (the only one in town) galvanized black.
> Graças a deus--he'd been in Belém. (186)

In the poem's final episode, the poet returns to her ship, taking with her an exquisite souvenir:

> In the blue pharmacy the pharmacist
> had hung an empty wasps' nest from a shelf:
> small, exquisite, clean matte white,
> and hard as stucco. I admired it
> so much he gave it to me.
> Then--my ship's whistle blew. I couldn't stay.
> Back on board, a fellow-passenger, Mr.Swan,
> Dutch, the retiring head of Philips Electric,
> really a very nice old man,
> who wanted to see the Amazon before he died,
> asked, "What's that ugly thing?" (187)

Mr. Swan's opinion about the wasps' nest reflects one side of the opposed pairings which the poet discards when referring to the rivers doubleness. In expressing her own judgment, the poet again avoids such notions: "I admired it...," says the poet, not necessarily implying that she considers the wasps' nest "beautiful." By keeping her souvenir in spite of Mr. Swan's opposition, the poet makes his judgment questionable. In his

condition of foreign tourist, Mr. Swan seems to confirm Freyre's assumption that some foreigners who visit Brazil tend to see "the extremes." Using "extremes" in their judgments would be simply a natural consequence of this tendency. If there is something that significantly distinguishes the poet from Mr. Swan, that something is <u>not</u> limiting herself to "the extremes."

To look at the very last images of Brazil in "Santarém" and "Pink Dog," two poems so much unlike and, at the same time, published back to back in 1978 and 1979, is to wonder at their strange "doubleness." Both the "bravado" of "Pink Dog" and the nostalgic re-creation of "Santarém" are genuine pictures of Brazil, each one with features too "unique" to be reduced to mere opposite pairings. One could say that, like the two rivers of "Santarém," these two poems have also had different "springs," and, for one of those inexplicable paths that Geography traces, they have ended up side by side, flowing together. In the "dazzling dialectic" of these two poems, the poet could restore what was saved from loss.

Poetry is in its essence the re-creation of what has been lost; as Carlos Drummond de Andrade says, "resíduo," the part that is left from life. Affonso Romano de Sant'Anna extends this definition, saying that poetry is

> aquilo que se salva no tempo e se estabelece como memória do próprio tempo. Poesia é o que resiste à destruição. O próprio Drummond diz: "O que se dissipou não era poesia". Poesia é o que fica depois do fluxo, depois da vida. é a derrota do tempo, porque é uma forma que se intemporalizou ao sintetizar vida e morte e ao somar os ganhos & perdas de um modo dialético. (191)

Being poetry what "resists destruction" or what is saved from loss, "Pink Dog" and "Santarém"--as well as "Crusoe in England," "One Art," and "Five Flights Up"--can be considered irrefutable testimonies that, for Elizabeth Bishop, Brazil has not been entirely lost. If something has dissipated, it was not poetry.

# NOTES

[1] Elizabeth Bishop, unpublished letter to Robert Lowell, 27 August 1964,Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Folder 16.

[2] See Thomas J. Travisano 178, 182; Lorrie Goldensohn 261; Robert Dale Parker 134.

[3] Schwartz reiterated this assertion during a meeting in Boston. Schwartz, personal interview, 30 March 1992.

[4] Elizabeth Bishop, unpublished letter to Robert Lowell, 21 March 1952, Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Folder 8.

[5] Elizabeth Bishop, unpublished letter to Lota de Macedo Soares, 21 February 1961, Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Box 15, Folder 226.

# CHAPTER VI

# CONCLUSION

The presence of Brazil in three decades of Elizabeth Bishop's poetry seems to be the story of how her poetry has attained maturity , being gradually and significantly enriched by the experiences it has recreated along this period. Most of what has been poetically recreated was the outcome of the poet's direct observation, or "lived" through her personal experience. Tracing Bishop's footsteps in Brazil through her poems, one observes not only her own process of perception of Brazil but relevant changes in her poetry as well.

In the first set of poems about Brazil--"Arrival at Santos," "Brazil January 1, 1502," and "Questions of Travel"--the poet's perspective is clearly expressed by her own identification as a "tourist" and a "traveler." Either depicting and commenting on the meagerness of the landscape at the Santos harbor, or praising the primitive nature of the past (or what was left from it), the poet's main concern is in expressing her perplexity regarding the scenery of "this strangest of theatres." The predominace of landscape and the consequent scarcity of Brazilian human types in this group of poems seem to be related to the poet's own condition as a foreign tourist still under the impact and the effects of her exposure to the Brazilian tropical nature. Yet the ordinary images depicted along the road in "Questions of Travel" constitute an important step in the poet's perception of Brazil, it is still the

picturesque or the primitive that impresses her.

As the poet merges into the Brazilian context, the "tourist" gives way to the "observer," interested in depicting more genuine images of Brazil. The first move in this direction is the shift of focus from the scenery to the human. "Squatter's Children" and "Manuelzinho," the first two poems to spotlight human types, are significant in this process. While in the former, the perception of "the other" is still characterized by a certain detachment on the part of the observer and a consequent impersonality of depiction in the characters, in the latter, the speaker's approach is distinguished by the particularization of the character. Important not only for being one of Bishop's most elaborate human portraits, "Manuelzinho" is also the poem in which she first experiences the use of a mask, speaking through the voice of "a friend of the writer."

Two other aspects are crucial in this process of immersion into the world of "the other:" the poet's relationship with the domestic world and the outer world. Although only three of Bishop's poems about Brazil (one of which remains unpublished) address her private world, they record the rare moments in her poetry in which she experiences what one could call, "a sense of home." Lloyd Schwartz believes that "Brazil may have been the closest thing to a real home that Bishop ever found after her paternal grandparents removed her from Nova Scotia" ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 90). It is interesting to observe that it is during her stay in Brazil that Bishop's past in Nova Scotia flows with more intensity both in her poetry and prose. Although, due to widely recognized shyness, Bishop has said very little about her domestic life in her poems,

it is possible to "peer" into some corners of her intimacy. It is not accidental that the only personal references in these poems are to the pet, Tobias, and to the maid, Custodia. Here, the existence of a family or a companion is only "suggested" in an impersonal "we." Brief in Bishop's poetry and in her real life, the sense of home significantly appears in "Song for the Rainy Season" linked to the sense of loss. Both Nova Scotia and Brazil were homes irreversibly lost. The "three loved houses" that "went" in "One Art" are a clear reference to these places.

While the poems dealing with domestic issues show the first evidence of the poet's familiarity with her adopted country, the poems addressing social and political concerns already reveal her deep intimacy with Brazil's main problems at the time. It is possible to observe even a certain development in the poet's responses to such problems. The observer, who in "The Burglar of Babylon" keeps the anonimity and the detachment of her binoculars, avoiding any sort of judgment, in "Brazil 1959" admits her personal testimony, to the extent of manifesting a political view hitherto absent from her poetry. "Pink Dog" not only is distinguished from the former poems by the aggressiveness and daring of its criticism but, overall, by the Brazilian attitudes it so impressively incorporates.

Considering the previous changes in the persona's view--from a "tourist" and a "traveler" to a careful "observer"--one could say that, in "The Riverman," the poet eventually becomes "a believer in total immersion." By identifying himself with the riverman, the speaker, who so far had fundamentally been an observer, becomes the protagonist of his own monologue. His plunging into the mysterious

world of "the other" and taking part in its rituals is in its essence an act of acceptance of the unknown and, therefore, an act of belief. Belief is, indeed, what leads to "total immersion." The poem's final reference to "godfathers and cousins" in their canoes on the surface of the river and the poet submerged establishes conclusive differences between the poet and these "surface" travelers. The opposition in terms of "depth" not only distinguishes the poet's level of immersion in regard to her "godfathers and cousins" but also suggests consequent differences of perspective between them. At this point in her poetry about Brazil, Bishop's perspective is no longer the one of a conventional foreigner. As she herself has recognized, in the interview with Ashley Brown cited above, "living in the way [she has] happened to live here has made a great difference" and "changed a lot of [her] old stereotyped ideas" ("An Interview with Elizabeth Bishop" 290). The poem's final parallel between the poet and her "godfathers and cousins" seems to be a poetic metaphor for what indeed distinguishes her from any conventional foreigner or outside observer still limited to "surface" views of Brazil.

Besides offering a wide open perspective of Brazil and showing the poet's own process of maturation from the perception of to the identification with "the other," this set of poems also registers relevant changes in Bishop's poetry. The shift of focus from the landscape to the human, the inclusion of scenes of the ordinary (a sort of half-open window to her domestic life), and the development of her poetic responses to social and political problems are certainly among Bishop's most significant accomplishments as a poet in this period. It is interesting to notice that some of the

accomplishments of this phase end up triggering further changes. The use of the mask first experienced in "Manuelzinho," and largely developed in "The Riverman," becomes, in later poems, the ideal "oblique" expression of the poet's own self and inner conflicts.

In the next segment of Bishop's poetry, the best definition for the personae of the poems is, perhaps, what the three rain-creatures of "Rainy-Season; Sub-Tropics" figuratively represent. Living the conflict of being paradoxically "strayed" and "rooted," the poet expresses this ambivalence either through the drama of the strange creatures of "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics." as well as through the depiciton of the disturbing routine of Rio de Janeiro and Ouro Preto. "Rainy-Season; Sub-Tropics," the only prose-poem Bishop ever wrote, is also the poem in which she first experiences the mask to express her most intimate conflicts. Considering an on-going move toward the personal in Bishop's poetry, one could say that the adoption of the mask as the expression of her own self is the first significant step in this direction. For a poet who has consistently avoided being confessional, the use of the mask becomes an ideal way of saying truths about herself in an "oblique" way. It is also in this period that Bishop's descriptions of the ordinary gain more authenticity, revealing her deep intimacy with the routine she depicts.

In spite of making no explicit references to Brazil, the poems in Geography III are closely related to what has been lived or experienced here. "Crusoe in England" and "One Art," for instance, are undoubtedly the poems which most intimately reflect connections with Bishop's experience in Brazil. The process of adoption and development of the mask in previous poems--"Manuelzinho," "The

Riverman," and "Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics"-- was certainly decisive in the creation of "Crusoe." One of Bishop's most intriguing masks, "Crusoe" is also the one which seems closer to her own story. This subtle move toward the personal, first obliquely manifested under the guise of the mask, becomes more visible in "One Art" and further poems. Creating a fiction for her own story seems to have been a necessary step in order that the poet could later on reach another level in this process, and eventually be able to speak more openly about herself in her own voice. It is worth remembering here what Schwartz observes in regard to the creation of "Crusoe in England" and "One Art," i. e., that it must have been possible for Bishop to say something "true of herself because she has already said it is true of someone else" ("'One Art:' The Poetry of Elizabeth Bishop, 1971-1976" 139).

The straightforward personal tone of "Santarém" confirms the poet's rupture with the mask and the definitive adoption of the "I" of the poem as the expression of her own "self." Brazil, which, as it seemed, had been irreversibly lost in "One Art," reappears surprisingly alive in the re-creation of images from the past. Considering the time of Bishop's trip down the Amazon and the time "Santarém" was published, the images depicted remained in her memory for almost two decades. Beside "Pink Dog," "Santarém" is the most convincing evidence that Brazil has always been present in her poetry, since Bishop's first poetic accounts soon after her arrival in the country.

The "dazzling dialectic" of the two rivers in "Santarém" seems to sum up figuratively the "dazzling dialectic" of Bishop's own experience in Brazil.Like the two rivers flowing side by side, yet

keeping their own features, Bishop lives the doubleness of the two cultures. In a much more prosaic way, Bishop expresses this doubleness in a small, unpublished note, significantly placed on the same page on which she records the first "night" images of the Santos harbor, soon after her arrival:

> To me, it was and is an endless fascinating country, like none other on the globe, and I was lucky to spend most of these years in the company of Brazilians and to see society from a double point of view--perhaps in that way more three dimensionally than a traveler or a tourist would have seen it, or the Brazilians themselves... People, people, including the magnificently interesting servants; pets, exotic or as familiar as the canary.
>
> & lived on roast bife sanduiches, coffee, and Coca Cola, the only things I could pronounce the names of intelligibly.[1]

It is interesting to observe that instead of using the original words "beef" and "sandwich" in her own language, the poet writes them in Portuguese. Like the "occasional blue eyes" in brown faces that the poet observes on the streets of "Santarém," here, the traces of the two cultures are also integrated in the words. Certainly "roast bife sanduiches, coffee, and Coca Cola" were not the only traces of her native culture which Bishop has preserved during her stay in Brazil. In the note above, possibly written in 1968-1969, according to references on the same page, Bishop also defines the essence of her own perspective in regard to Brazil: "... and to see society from a double point of view--perhaps in that way more three dimensionally than a traveler or tourist would have seen it, or the Brazilians themselves..." The development of Bishop's poetry about Brazil simply confirms poetically this "three dimensional" perspective of Brazil. More than exactly the time

Bishop has spent here or her praised capacity of observation, what may have allowed her to have such a "unique" view of Brazil was certainly the sensitive insight of the poet.

Octavio Paz, one of Bishop's closest poet friends, makes an important comment on what Brazil may have added to Bishop's sensibility as a poet:

> She was, say, new Englander from very puritan ancestry, with difficulties to exteriorize her feelings and that, perhaps, for her, Brazil (generally South America, but especially Brazil) was something to open not her mind but, perhaps, her heart and her sensibility.[2]

If Brazil was "something to open" the poet's "heart" or "sensibility" (and this can be observed by the significant move of her poetry toward the personal), this "openness" never turns into confessionalism. Even the few poems about love and sexuality the poet wrote during her stay in Brazil keep on being marked by her typical "obliqueness," "reticence," her meaningful silences. One of these poems left behind in Ouro Preto after Bishop's return to America clearly illustrates these traces of her poetry.

> Dear, my compass
> still points north
> to wooden houses
> and blue eyes,
>
> fairy-tales where
> flaxen-headed
> younger sons
> bring home the goose,
>
> love in hay-lofts,
> Protestants, and
> heavy drinkers...
> Springs are backward,
>
> but crab-apples
> ripen to rubies,

cranberries
to drops of blood,

and swans can paddle
icy water,
so hot the blood
in those webbed feet.

--Cold as it is, we'd
go to bed, dear,
early, but never
to keep warm.[3]

Brazil, the other extreme in the poem's bipolarity, is a sort of absent mirror against which the poet reflects the world of her childhood. Schwartz observes that, in looking back at her past in Nova Scotia "against the life she chose for herself later," Bishop "measures not only how far she has travelled from her origins but how difficult it is to escape them" ("Elizabeth Bishop and Brazil" 86). The constant bipolarity of "north" and "south" in Bishop's personal life, meaningfully anticipated in the tit
le of her first book, allowed her to achieve the ideal balance of her own poetry. Lorrie Goldensohn sees this balance as the conciliation of "northern reticence and southern emotional release as the desirable condition of [the poet's own] existence" (Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry xii. Preface). No other image in Bishop's poetry could more significantly express the presence of these two forces both in her poetry and in her life than the mysterious "doubleness" of the two rivers of "Santarém." In that silent "conflux of the two great rivers" the poet seems to have found the key for the "dazzling dialectic" of her own existence.

# NOTES

[1] Elizabeth Bishop Collection, Vassar College Library, Poughkeepsie, Series Brazil, Box 36, Folder 574.

[2] Elizabeth Bishop, Voices & Visions Series, New York Center for Visual History Production, 1987 (56 min.).

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# APPENDIX

Published Poems Used in the Dissertation

## Arrival at Santos

Here is a coast; here is a harbor;
here, after a meager diet of horizon, is some scenery:
impractically shaped and--who knows?--self-pitying
mountains,
sad and harsh beneath their frivolous greenery,

with a litle church on top of one. And warehouses,
some of them painted a feeble pink, or blue,
and some tall, uncertain palms. Oh, tourist,
is this how this country is going to answer you

and your immodest demands for a different world,
and a better life, and complete comprehension
of both at last, and immediately,
after eighteen days of suspension?

Finish your breakfast, The tender is coming,
a strange and ancient craft, flying a strange and
brilliant rag.
So that's the flag. I never saw it before.
I somehow never thought of there being a flag,

but of course there was, all along. And coins, I presume,
and paper money; they remain to be seen.
And gingerly now we climb down the ladder backward,
myself and a fellow passenger named Miss Breen,

descending into the midst of twenty-six freighters
waiting to be loaded with green coffee beans.
Please, boy, do be more careful with that hook!
Watch out! Oh! It has caught Miss Breen's

skirt! There! Miss Breen is about seventy,
a retired police lieutenant, six feet tall,
with beautiful bright blue eyes and a kind expression.
Her home, when she is at home, is in Glens Fall

s, New York. There. We are settled.
The customs officials will speak English, we hope,
and leave us our bourbon and cigarettes.
Ports are necesssities, like postage stamps, or soap,

but they seldom seem to care what impression they make,
or, like this, only attempt, since it does not matter,
the unassertive colors of soap, or postage stamps--
wasting away like the former, slipping the way the latter

do when we mail the letters we wrote on the boat,
either because the glue here is very inferior
or because of the heat. We leave Santos at once;
we are driving to the interior. (89-90)

## Brazil, January 1,1502

...embroidered nature... tapestried lanscape.
--Landscape into Art, by Sir Kenneth Clark

Januaries, Nature greets our eyes
exactly as she must have greeted theirs:
every square inch filling in with filiage--
big leaves, little leaves, and giant leaves,
blue, blue-green, and olive,
with occasional lighter veins and edges,
or a satin underleaf turned over;
monster ferns
in silver-gray relief,

and flowers, too, like giant water lilies
up in the air--up, rather, in the leaves--
purple, yellow, two yellows, pink,
rust red and greyish white;
solid but airy; fresh as if just finished
and taken off the frame.

A blue-white sky, a simple web,
backing for feathery detail:
brief arcs, a pale-green broken wheel,
a few palms, swarthy, squat, but delicate;
and perching there in profile, beaks agape,
the big symbolic birds keep quiet,
each showing only half his puffed and padded,
pure-colored or spotted breast.
Still in the foreground ther is Sin:
five sooty dragons near some massy rocks.
The rocks are worked with lichens, gray moonbursts
splattered and overlapping,
threatened from underneath by moss
in lovely hell-green flames,
attacked above
by scaling-ladder vines, oblique and neat,
"one leaf yes and one leaf no" (in Portuguese).
The lizards scarcely breathe; all eyes
are on the smaller, female one, back-to,
her wicked tail straight up and over,
red as a red-hot wire.

Just so the Christians, hard as nails,
tiny as nails, and glinting,
in creaking armor, came and found it all,
not unfamiliar:
no lovers'walks, no bowers,
no cherries to be picked, no lute music,
but corresponding, nevertheless,
to an old dream of wealth and luxury

already out of style when they left home--
wealth, plus a brand-new pleasure.
Directly after Mass, humming perhaps
L'Homme armé or some such tune,
they ripped away into the hanging fabric,
each out to catch an Indian for himself--
those maddening little women who kept calling,
calling to each other (or had the birds waked up?)
and retreating, always retreating, behind it. (91-92)

## Questions of Travel

There are too many waterfalls here;the crowded streams
hurry too rapidly down to the sea,
and the pressure of so many clouds on the mountaintops
makes them spill over the sides in soft slow motion,
turning to waterfalls under our very eyes.
--For if those streaks, those mile long, shiny,
tearstains,
aren't waterfalls yet,
in a quick age or so, as ages go here,
they probably will be.
But if the streams and clouds keep travelling,
travelling,
the mountains look like the hulls of capszied ships,
slime-hung and barnacled.

Think of the long trip home.
Should we have stayed at home and thought of here?
Where should we be today?
Is it right to be watching strangers in a play
in this strangest of theatres?
What childishness is it that there's a breath of life
in our bodies, we are determined to rush
to see the sun the other way around?
The tinniest green humming bird in the world?

To stare at some inexplicable old stonework,
inexplicable and impenetrable,
at any view,
instantly seen and always, always delightful?
Oh, must we dream our dreams
and have them, too?
And have we room
for one more folded sunset, still quite warm?

But surely it would have been a pity
not to have seen the trees along this road,
really exaggerated in their beauty,
not to have seen them gesturing
like noble pantomimists, robed in pink.
--Not to have had to stop for gas and heard
the sad, two-noted, wooden tune
of disparate wooden clogs
carelessly clacking over
a grease-stained filling-station floor.
(In another country the clogs would all be tested.
Each pair there would have identical pitch.)
--A pity not to have heard
the other, less primitive music of the fat brown bird
who sings above the broken gasoline pump
in a bamboo church of Jesuit baroque:
three towers, five silver crosses.
--Yes, a pity not have pondered,
blurr'dly and inconclusively,
on what connection can exist for centuries
between the crudest wooden footwear
and, carefully and finickly,
the whittled fantasies of wooden cages.
--Never to have studied history in
the weak caligraphy of songbirds' cages.
--And never to have had to listen to rain
so much like politicians' speeches:
two hours of unrelenting oratory

and then a sudden golden silence
in which the traveller takes a notebook, writes:

"Is it a lack of imagination that makes us come
to imagined places, not just stay at home?
Or could Pascal have been not entirely right
about just sitting quietly in one's room?

Continent, city, country, society:
the choice is never wide and never free.
And here, or there... No. Should we have stayed at home,
wherever that may be?" (93-94)

## Squatter's Children

On the unbreathing sides of hills
they play, a specklike girl and a boy,
alone, but near a specklike house.
The sun's suspended eye
blinks casually, and then they wade
gigantic waves of light and shade.
A dancing yellow spot, a pup,
attends them. Clouds are piling up;

a sorm piles up behind the house.
The children play at digging holes.
The ground is hard; they try to use
one of their father's tools,
a mattock with a broken haft
the two of them can scarcely lift.
It drops and clangs. Their laughter spreads
effulgence in the thunderheads,

weak flashes of inquiry
direct as the puppy's bark.

But to their little, soluble,
unwarrantable ark,
apparently the rain's reply
consists of echolalia,
and Mother's voice, ugly as sin,
keeps calling to them to come in.

Children, the threshold of the storm
has slid beneath your muddy shoes;
wet and beguiled, you stand among
the mansions you may choose
out of a bigger house than yours,
whose lawfulness endures.
Its soggy documents retain
your rights in rooms of falling rain. (95)

## Manuelzinho

[Brazil. A friend of the writer is speaking.]

Half squatter, half tenant (no rent)--
a sort of inheritance; white,
in your thirties now, and supposed
to supply me with vegetables,
but you don't; or you won't; or you can't
get the idea through your brain--
the world's worst gardener since Cain.
Tilted above me, your gardens
ravish my eyes. You edge
the beds of silver cabbages
with red carnations, and lettuces
mix with alyssum. And then
umbrella ants arrive,
or it rains for a solid week
and the whole thing's ruined again
and I buy you more pounds of seeds,

imported, guaranteed,
and eventually you bring me
a mystic three-legged carrot,
or a pumpkin "bigger than the baby."

I watch you through the rain,
trotting, light, on bare feet,
up the steep paths you have made---
or your father and grandfather made--
all over my property,
with your head and back inside
a sodden burlap bag,
and I feel I cán't endure it
another minute; then,
indoors, beside the stove,
keep on reading a book.

You steal my telephone wires,
or someone does. You starve
your horse and yourself
and your dogs and family.
Among endless variety,
you eat boilded cabbage stalks.
And once I yelled at you
so loud to hurry up
and fetch me those potatoes
your holey hat flew off,
you jumped out of your clogs,
leaving three objects arranged
in a triangle at my feet,
as if you'd been a gardener
in a fairy tale all this time
and at the word "potatoes"
had vanished to take up your work
of fairy prince somewhere.

The strangest things happen, to you.
Your cow eats a "poison grass"
and drops dead on the spot.
Nobody else's does.
And then your father dies,
a superior old man
with a black plush hat, and a moustache
like a white spread-eagled sea gull.
The family gathers, but you,
no, you "don't think he's dead!
I look at him. He's cold.
They're burying him today.
But you know, I don't think he's dead."
I give you money for the funeral
and you go and hire a bus
for the delighted mourners,
so I have to hand over some more
and then have to hear you tell me
you pray for me every night!

And then you come again,
sniffing and shivering,
hat in hand, with that wistful
face, like a child fistful
of bluets or white violets,
improvident as the dawn,
and once more I provide
for a shot of penicillin
down at the pharmacy, or
one more bottle of
Electrical Baby Syrup.
Or, briskly, you come to settle
what we call our "accounts,"
with two old copybooks,
one with flowers on the cover,
the other with a camel.
Immediate confusion.

You've left out the decimal points.
Your columns stagger,
honeycombed with zeros.
You whisper conspiratorially;
the numbers mount to millions.
Account books? They are Dream Books.
In the kitchen we dream together
how the meek shall inherit the earth--
or several acres of mine.

With blue sugar bags on their heads,
carrying your lunch,
your children scuttle by me
like little moles aboveground,
or even crouch behind bushes
as if I were out to shoot them!
--Impossible to make friends,
though each will grab at once
for an orange or a piece of candy.

Twinned in wisps of fog,
I see you all up there
along with Formoso, the donkey,
who brays like a pump gone dry,
then suddenly stops.
--All just standing, staring
off into fog and space.
Or coming down at night,
in silence, except for hoofs,
in dim moonlight, the horse
or Formoso stumbling after.
Between us float a few
big, soft, pale-blue,
sluggish fireflies,
the jellyfish of the air...

Patch upon patch upon patch,
your wife keeps all of you covered.
She has gone over and over
(forearmed is forwarned)
your pair of bright-blue pants
with white thread, and these days
your limbs are draped in blueprints.
You paint--heaven knows why--
the outside of the crown
and brim of your straw hat.
Perhaps to reflect the sun?
Or perhaps when you were small,
your mother said, "Manuelzinho,
one thing: be sure you always
paint your straw hat."
One was gold for a while,
but the gold wore off, like plate.
One was bright green. Unkindly,
I called you Klorophyll Kid.
My visitors thought it was funny.
I apologize here and now.

You helpless, foolish man,
I think. Or do I?
I take off my hat, unpainted
and figurative, to you.
Again I promise to try. (96-99)

## Electrical Storm

Down an unsympathetic yellow.
Cra-aack!--dry and light.
The house was really struck.
Crack! A tinny sound, like a dropped tumbler.
Tobias jumped in the window, got in bed--
silent, his eyes bleached white, his fur on end.

Personal and spiteful as a neighbor's child,
thunder began to bang and bump the rrof.
One pink flash;
then hail, the biggest size of artificial pearls.
Dead-white, wax-white, cold--
diplomats' wives' favors
from an old moon party--
they lay in melting windrows
on the red ground until well after sunrise.
We got up to find the wiring fused,
no lights, a smell of salpetre,
and the telephone dead.

The cat stayed in the warm sheets.
The Lent trees had shed all their petals:
wet, stuck, purple, among the dead-eyed pearls. (100)

## Song for the Rainy Season

Hidden, oh hidden
in the high fog
the house we live in,
beneath the magnectic rock,
rain-, rainbow-ridden,
where blood-black
bromelias, lichens,
owls, and the lint
of the waterfalls cling,
familiar, unbidden.

In a dim age
of water
the brook sings loud
from a rib cage
of a giant fern; vapor
climbs up the thick growth

effortlessly, turns back,
holding them both,
house and rock,
in aprivate cloud.

At night, on the roof,
blind drops crawl
and the ordinary brown
owl gives us proof
he can count:
five times--always five--
he stamps and takes off
after the fat frogs that,
shrilling for love,
clamber and mount.

House, open house
to the white dew
and the milk-white sunrise
kind to the eyes,
to membership
of silver fish, mouse,
bookworms,
big moths; with a wall
for the mildew's
ignorant map;

darkened and tarnished
by the warm touch
of the warmth breath,
maculate, cherished,
rejoice! For a later
era will differ.
(O difference that kills,
or intimidates, much
of all our small shadowy
life!) Without water

the great rock will stare
unmagnetized, bare,
no longer wearing
rainbows or rain,
the forgiving air
and the high fog gone;
the owls will move on
and the several
waterfalls shrivel
in the steady sun. (101-102)

## The Riverman

[A man in a remote Amazonian village decides to become a sacaca, a witch doctor who works with water spirits. The river dolphin is believed to have supernatural powers; Luandinha is a river spirit associated with the moon; and the pirarucú is a fish weighing up to four hundred pounds. These and other details on which this poem is based are from Amazon Town, by Charles Wagley]

I got up in the night
for the Dolphin spoke to me.
He grunted beneath my window,
hid by the river mist,
but I glimpsed him--a man like myself.
I threw off my blanket, sweating;
I even tore off my shirt.
I got out of my hammock
and went through the window naked.
My wife slept and snored
Hearing the Dolphin ahead,
I went down to the river
and the moon was burning bright
as the gasoline-lamp mantle
with the flame turned up too high,

just before it begins to scorch.
I went down to the river.
I heard the Dolphin sigh
as he slid into the water.
I stood there listening
till he called from far outstream.
I waded into the river
and suddenly a door
in the water opened inward,
groaning a little, with water
bulging above the lintel.
I looked back at my house,
white as piece of washing
forgotten on the bank,
and I thought once of my wife,
but I knew what I was doing.

They gave me a shell of cachaça
and decorated cigars.
The smoke rose like mist
through the water, and our breaths
didn't make any bubbles.
We drank cachaça and smoked
the green cheroots. The room
filled with gray-green smoke
and my head couldn't have been dizzier.
Then a tall, beautiful serpent
in white elegant satin,
with her big eyes green and gold
like the lights on the river steamers--
yes, Luandinha, none other--
entered and greeted me.
She complimented me
in a language I didn't know;
but when she blew cigar smoke
into my ears and nostrils
I understood, like a dog,

although I cán't speak it yet.
They showed me room after room
and took me from here to Belém
and back again in a minute.
In fact, I'm not sure where I went,
but miles, under the river.

Three times now I've been there.
I don't eat fish anymore.
There is a fine mud on my scalp
and I know from smelling my comb
that the river smells in my hair.
My hands and feet are cold.
I look yellow, my wife says,
and she brews me stinking teas
I throw out behind her back.

Every moonlit night
I'm to go back again.
I know some things already,
but it will take years of study,
it is all so difficult.
They gave me a mottled rattle
and a pale-green coral twig
and some special weeds like smoke.
(They're under my canoe.)
When the moon shines on the river,
oh, faster then you can think it
we travle upstream and downstream,
we journey from here to there,
under the floating canoes,
right through the wicker traps,
when the moon shines on the river
and Luandinha gives a party.

Three time now I've attended.
Her rooms shine like silver
with the light from overhead,
a steady stream of light
like at the cinema.

I need a virgin mirror
no one's ever looked at,
that's never looked back at anyone,
to flash up the spirits' eyes
and help me recognize them.
The storekeeper offered me
a box of little mirrors,
but each time I picked one up
a neighbor looked over my shoulder
and then that one was spoiled--
spoiled, that is, for anything
but the girls to look at their mouths in,
to examine their teeths and smiles.

Why shoudn't I be ambitious?
I sincerely desire to be
a serious sacaca
Like Fortunato Pombo,
or Lúcio, or even
the grat Joaquim Sacaca.
Look, it stands to reason
that everything we need
can be obtained from the river.
I drains the jungles; it draws
from trees and plants and rocks
from half around the world,
it draws from the very heart
of the earth to remedy
for each od the deseases--
one just has to know how to find it.

But everything must be there
in that magic mud, beneath
the multitudes of fish,
deadly or innocent,
the giant pirarucús,
the turtles and crocodiles,
tree trunks and sunk canoes,
with the crayfish, with the worms
with tiny electric eyes
turning on and off and on.
The river breathes in salt
and breathes it out again,
and all is sweetnes there
in the deep, enchanted silt.

When the moon burns white
and the river makes that sound
like a primus pumped uphigh--
that fast, high whispering
like a hundred people at once--
I'll be there below,
as the turtle rattle hisses
and the coral gives the sign,
travelling fast as a wish,
with wy magic cloak of fish
swerving as I swerve,
following the veins,
the river's long, long veins,
to find the pure elixirs.
Godfathers and cousins,
your canoes are over my head:
I hear your voices talking.
You can peer down and down
or dredge the river bottom
but never, never catch me.
When the moon shines and the river
lies across the earth

and sucks it like a child,
then I will go to work
to get you health and money.
The Dolphin singled me out;
Luandinha seconded it. (105-109)

## The Burglar of Babylon

On the fair green hills of Rio
  There grows a fearful stain:
The poor who come to Rio
  And can't go home again.

On the hills a million people,
  A million sparrows, nest,
Like a confused migration
  That's had to light and rest,

Building its nests, or houses,
  Out of nothing at all, or air.
You'd think a breath would end them,
  They perch so lightly there.

But they cling and spread like lichen,
  And the people come and come.
There's one hill called the Chicken,
  And one called Catacomb;

There's the hill of Kerosene,
  And the hill of the Skeleton,
The hill of Astonishment,
  And the hill of Babylon.

Micuçú was a burglar and killer,
  An enemy of society.
He had scaped three times
  From the worst penitentiary.

They don't know how many he murdered
  (Though they say he never raped),
And he wounded two policemen
  This last time he scaped.

They said, "He'll go to his auntie,
  Who raised him like a son.
She has a little drink shop
  On the hill of Babylon."

He did go straight to his auntie,
  And he drank a final beer.
He told her, "The soldiers are coming ,
  And I've got to dissapear.

"Ninety years they gave me.
  Who wants to live that long?
I'll settle for ninety hours,
  On the hill of Babylon.

"Don't tell anyone you saw me.
  I'll run as long as I can.
You were good to me, and I love you,
  But I'm a doomed man."

Going out, he met a mulata
  Carrying water on her head.
"if you say you saw me, daughter,
  You're just as good as dead."

There are caves up there, and hideouts,
  And an old fort, falling down.
They used to watch for Frenchmen
  From the hill of Babylon.

Below him was the ocean.
  It reached far up the sky,
Flat as a wall, and on it
  Were freighters passing by,

Or climbing the wall, and climbing
  Till each looked like a fly,
And then fell over and vanished;
  And he knew he was going to die.

He could hear the goats baa-baa-ing,
  He could hear the babies cry;
Fluttering kites strained upward;
  And he knew he was going to die.

A buzzard flapped so near him
  He could see its naked neck.
He waved his arms and shouted,
  "Not yet, my son, not yet!"

An Army helicopter
  Came nosing around and in.
He could see two men inside it,
  But they never spotted him.

The soldiers were all over,
  On all sides of the hill,
And right against the skyline
  A row of them, small and still.

Children peeked out of windows,
  And men in the drink shop swore,
And spat a little cachaça
  At the light cracks in the floor.

But the soldiers were nervous, even
  With tommy guns in hand,
And one of them, in a panic,
  Shot the officer in command.

He hit him in three places;
  The other shots went wild.
The soldier had hysterics
  And sobbed like a little child.

The dying man said, "Finish
  The job we came here for."
He commited his soul to God
  And the sons to the Governor.

They ran and got a priest
  And he died in hope of Heaven
--A man from Pernambuco,
  The youngest of eleven.

They wanted to stop the search,
  But the Army said, "No, go on,"
So the soldiers swarmed again
  Up the hill of Babylon.

Rich people in apartments
  Watched through binoculars
As long as the daylight lasted.
  And all night, under the stars,

Micuçú hid in the grasses
  Or sat in a little tree,
Listening for sounds, and staring
  At the lighthouse out at sea.

And the lighthouse stared back at him,
  Till finally it was dawn.
He was soaked with dew, and hungry,
  On the hill of Babylon.

The yellow sun was ugly,
  Like a raw egg on a plate--
Slick from the sea. He cursed it,
  For he knew it sealed his fate.

He saw the long white beaches
  And people going to swim,
With towels and beach umbrelllas,
  But the soldiers were after him.

Far, far below, the people
  Were little colored spots,
And the heads of those in swimming
  Were floating coconuts.

He heard the peanut vendor
  Go peep-peep on his whistle,
And the man that sells umbrellas
  Swinging his watchman's rattle.

Women with market baskets
  Stood on the corners and talked,
Then went on their way to market,
  Gazing up as they walked.

The rich with their binoculars
  Were back again, and many
Were standing on the rooftops,
  Among TV antennae.

It was early, eight or eight-thirty.
  He saw a soldier climb,
Looking right at him. He fired,
  And missed for the last time.

He could hear the soldier panting,
  Though he never got very near.
Micuçú dashed for shelter.
  But he got it, behind the ear.

He heard the babies crying
  Far, far away in his head,
And the mongrels barking and barking
  Then Micuçú was dead.

He had a Taurus revolver,
  And just the clothes he had on,
With two contos in the pockets,
  On the hill of Babylon.

The police and the populace
  Heaved a sigh of relief,
But behind the counter his auntie
  Wiped her eyes in grief.

"We have always been respected.
  My shop is honest and clean.
I loved him, but from a baby
  Micuçú was always mean.

"We have always been respected.
  His sister has a job.
Both of us gave him money.
  Why did he have to rob?

"I raised him to be honest,
  Even here in Babylon slum."
The customers had another,
  Looking serious and glum.

But one of them said to another,
  When he got outside the door,
"He wasn't much of a burglar,
  He got caught six times--or more."

This morning the little soldiers
  Are on Babylon hill again;
Their gun barrels and helmets
  Shine in a gentle rain.

Micuçú is buried already.
  They're after another two,
But they say they aren't as dangerous
  As the poor Micuçú.

On the fair green hills of Rio
  There grows a fearful stain:
The poor who come to Rio
  And can't go home again.

There's the hill of Kerosene,
  And the hill of the Skeleton,
The hill of Astonishment,
  And the hill of Babylon. (112-118)

## Rainy Season; Sub-Tropics

### Giant Toad

I am too big, too big by far. Pity me.

My eyes bulge and hurt. They are my one great beauty, even so. They see too much, above, below, and yet there is not much to see. The rain has stopped. The mist is gathering on my skin in drops. The drops run down my back, run from the corners of my downturned mouth, run down my sides and drip beneath my belly. Perhaps the droplets on my mottled hide are pretty, like dewdrops, silver on a moldering leaf? They chill me through and through. I feel my colors changing now, my pigments gradually shudder and shift over.

Now I shall get beneath that overhanging ledge. Slowly. Hop. Two or three times more, silently. That was too far. I'm standing up. The lichen's gray, and rough to my front feet. Get down. Turn facing out, it's safer. Dont breathe until the snail gets by. But we go travelling the same weathers.

Swallow the air and mouthful of cold mist. Give voice, just once. O how it echoed from the rock! What a profound, angelic bell I rang!

I live, I breathe, by swallowing. Once, some naughty children picked me up, me and two brothers. They sat us down again somewhere and in our mouths they put lit cigarettes. We could not help but smoke them, to the end. I thought it was the death of me, but when I was entirely filled with smoke, when my slack mouth was burning, and all my tripes were hot and dry, they let us go. But I was sick for days.

I have big shouders, like a boxer. They are not muscle, however, and their color is dark. They are my sacs of poison, the almost unused poison that I bear, my burden and my great responsibility. Big wings of poison, folded on my back. Beware, I am an angel in disguise; my wings are evil, but not deadly. If I will it, the poison could break through, blue-black, and dangerous to all. Blue-black flumes would rise upon the air. Beware, you frivolous crab.

## Strayed Crab

This is not my home. How did I get so far from water? It must be over that way somewhere.

I am the color of wine, of tinta. The inside of my powerful white claw is saffron-yellow. See, I see it now; I wave it like a flag. I am dapper and elegant; I move with great precision, cleverly managing all my smaller yellow claws. I believe in the oblique, the indirect approach, and I keep my feelings to myself.

But on this strange, smooth surface I am making too much noise. I wasn't meant for this. If I maneuver a bit and keep a sharp lookout, I shall find my pool again. Watch out for my right claw, all passersby! This place is too hard.The rain has stopped, and it is damp, but still not wet enough to please me.

My eyes are good, though small; my shell is tough and tight. In my own pool are many small gray fish. I see right through them. Only their large eyes are opaque, and twitch at me. They are hard to catch, but I, I catch them quickly in my arms and eat them up.

What is that big soft monster, like a yellow cloud, stifling and warm? What is it doing? It pats my back. Out, claw. There I have freightened it away. It's sitting down, pretending nothing's happened. I'll skirt it.It's still pretending not to see me. Out of my way, O monster. I own a pool, all the little fish swim in it, and all the skittering waterbugs that smell like rotten apples.

Cheer up, O grievous snail. I tap your shell, encouragingly, not that you will ever know about it.

And I want nothing to do with you, either, sulking toad. Imagine, at least four times my size and yet so vulnerable... I could open your belly with my claw. You glare and bulge, a watchdog near my pool; you make a loud and hollow noise. I do not care for such stupidity. I admire compression, lightness, and agility, all rare in this loose world.

## Giant Snail

The rain has stopped. The waterfall will roar like that all night. I have come out to walk and feed. My body--foot, that is--is wet and cold and covered with sharp gravel. It is white, the size of a dinner plate. I have set myself a goal, a certain rock, but it may well be dawn before I get there. Although I move ghostlike and my floating edges barely graze the ground, I am heavy, heavy, heavy. My white muscles are already tired. I give the impression of mysterious eae, but it is only with the greatest effort of my will that I can rise above the smallest stones and sticks. And I must not let myself be distracted by those rough spears of grass. Don't touch them. Draw back. Withdrawal is always best.

The rain has stopped. The waterfall makes such a noise! ( And what if I fall over it?) The mountains of black rock give off such clouds of steam! Shiny streamers are hanging down their sides. When this occurs, we have a saying that the Snail Gods have come down in haste. I could never descend such steep escarpments, much less dream of climbing them.

That toad was too big, too, like me. His eyes beseeched my love. Our proportions horrify our neighbors.

Rest a minute; relax. Flattened to the ground, my body is like a pallid decomposing leaf. What's that tapping on my shell? Nothing. Let's go on.

My sides move in rhythmic waves, just off the ground, from front to back, the wake of a ship, wax-white water, or a slowly melting floe. I am cold, cold, cold as ice. My blind, white bull's head was a Cretan scare-head; degenerate, my four horns that can't attack. The sides of my mouth are now my hands. They press the earth and suck it hard. Ah, but I know my shell is beautiful, and high, and glazed, and shining. I know it well, although I have not seen it. Its curled white lip is of the finest enamel. Inside, it is as smooth as silk, and I, I fill it to perfection.

My wide wake shines, now it is growing dark. I leave a lovely opalescent ribbon: I know this.

But O! I am too big. I feel it. Pity me.

If and when I reach the rock, I shall go into a certain crack there for the night. The waterfall below will vibrate through my shell and body all night long. In that steady pulsing I can rest. All night I shall be like a sleeping ear. (139-142)

## Going to the Bakery

[Rio de Janeiro]

Instead of gazing at the sea
the way she does on other nights,
the moon looks down the Avenida
Copacabana at the sights,

new to her but ordinary.
She leans on the slack trolley wires.
Below, the tracks slither between
lines of head-to-tail parked cars.

(The tin hides have the iridescence
of dying, flaccid toy balloons.)
The tracks end in a puddle of mercury;
the wires, at the moon's

magnetic instances, take off
to snarl in distant nebulae.
The bakery lights are dim. Beneath
our rationed electricity,

the round cakes look about to faint--
each turns up a glazed white eye.
The gooey tarts are red and sore.
Buy, buy, what shall I buy?

Now flour is adulterated
with cornmeal, the loaves of bread
lie like yellow-fever victims
laid out in a crowded ward.

The baker; sickly too, suggests
the "milk rolls," since they still are warm
and made with milk, he says. They feel
like a baby on the arm.

Under the false- almond tree's
leathery leaves, a childish puta
dances, feverish as an atom:
chá-cha, chá-cha, chá-cha...

In front of my apartment house
a black man sits in a black shade,
lifting his shirt to show a bandage
on his black, invisible side.

Fumes of cachaça knock me over,
like gas fumes from an auto-crash.
He speaks in perfect gibberish.
The bandage glares up, white and fresh.

I give him seven cents in my
terrific money, say "Good night"
from force of habit. Oh, mean habit!
Not one word more apt or bright? (151-152)

## Under the Window:
## Ouro Preto

For Lilli Correia de Araújo

The conversations are simple: about food,
or, "When my mother combs my hair it hurts."
"Women." "Women!" Women in red dresses

and plastic sandals, carrying their almost
invisible babies--muffled to the eyes
in all the heat--unwrap them, lower them,

and give them drinks of water lovingly
from dirty hands, here where there used to be
a fountain, here where all the world still stops.

The water used to run out of the mouths
of three green soapstone faces. (One face laughed
and one face cried; the middle one just looked.

Patched up with plaster, they're in the museum.)
It runs now from a single iron pipe,
a strong and ropy stream. "Cold." "Cold s ice,"

all have agreed for several centuries.
Donkeys agree, and dogs, and the neat little
bottle-green swallows dare to dip and taste.

Here comes that old man with the stick and sack,
meandering again. He stops and fumbles.
He finally gets out his enamelled mug.

Here comes some laundry tied up in a sheet,
all on its own, three feet above the ground.
Oh, no--a small black boy is underneath.

Six donkeys come behind their "godmother"
--the one who wears a fringe of orange wool
with wooly balls above her eyes, and bells.

They veer toward the water as a matter
of course, until the drover's mare trots up,
her whiteplash-blinded eye on the off side.

A big new truck, Mercedes-Benz, arrives
to overawe them all. The body's painted
with throbbing rosebuds and the bumper says

HERE AM I FOR WHOM YOU HAVE BEEN WAITING.
The driver and assistant driver wash
their faces, necks, and chests. They wash their feet,

their shoes, and put them back together again.
Meanwhile, another, older truck grinds up
in a blue cloud of burning oil. It has

a syphilitic nose. Nevertheless,
its gallant driver tells the passersby
NOT MUCH MONEY BUT IT IS AMUSING.

"She's been in labor now two days." "Transistors
cost much too much." "For lunch we took advantage
of the poor duck the dog decapitated."

The seven ages of man are talkative
and soiled and thirsty.
Oil has seeped into
the margins of the ditch of standing water

and flashes or looks upward brokenly,
like bits of mirror--no, more blue than that:
like tatters of the Morpho butterfly. (153-154)

## One Art

The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss in no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

--Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster. (178)

## Santarém

Of course I may be remembering it all wrong
after, after--how many years?

That golden evening I really wanted to go no farther;
more than anything else I wanted to stay awhile
in that conflux of two great rivers, Tapajós, Amazon,
grandly, silently flowing, flowing east.

Suddenly there'd been houses, people, and lots of mongrel
riverboats skittering back and forth
under a sky of gorgeous, under-lit clouds,
with everything gilded, burnished along one side,
and everything bright, cheerful, casual--or so it looked.
I liked the place; I liked the idea of the place.
Two rivers. Hadn't two rivers sprung
fron the Garden of Eden? No, that was four
and they'd diverged. Here only two
and coming together. Even if one were tempted
to literary interpretations
such as: life / death, right / wrong, male / female
--such notions would have resolved, dissolved, straight
off
in that watery dazzling dialectic.

In front of the church, the Cathedral, rather,
there was a modest promenade and a belvedere
about to fall into the river,
stubby palms, flamboyants like pans of ambers,
buildings one story high, stucco, blue or yellow,
and one house faced with azulejos, buttercup yellow.
The street was deep in dark-gold river sand
damp from the ritual afternoon rain,
and teams of zebus plodded, gentle, proud,
and blue, with down-curved horns and hanging ears,
pulling carts with solid wheels.
The zebus' hooves, the people's feet
waded in golden sand,
dampered by golden sand,
so that almost the only sounds
were creaks and shush, shush, shush.

Two rivers full of crazy shipping--people
all apparently changing their minds, embarking,
disembarking, rowing clumsy dories.

(After the Civil War some Southern families
came here; here they could still own slaves.
They left occasional blue eyes, English nme,
and oars. No other place, no one
on all the Amazon's four thousand miles
does anything but paddle.)
A dozen or so young nuns, white-habited,
waved gaily from an old stern-wheeler
getting up steam, already hung with hammocks
--off to their mission, days and days away
up God knows what lost tributary.
Side wheelers, countless wobbling dugouts...
A cow stood up in one, quite calm,
chewing her cud while being ferried,
tipping, wobbling, somewhere, to be married.
A river schooner with raked masts
and violet-colored sails tacked in so close
her bowsprit seemed to touch the church

(Cathedral, rather!). A week or so before
there'd been a thunderstorm and the Cathedral'd
been struck by lightning. One tower had
a widening zigzag crack all the way down.
I was a miracle. The priest's house right next door
had been struck, too, and his brass bed
(the only one in town) galvanized black.
Graças a deus--he'd been in Belém.

In the blue pharmacy the pharmacist
had hung an empty wasps' nest from a shelf:
small, exquisite, clean matte white,
and hard as stucco. I admired it
so much he gave it to me.

Then--my ship's whistle blew. I couldn't stay.
Back on board, a fellow-passenger, Mr. Swan,
Dutch, the retiring head of Philips Electric,
really a very nice old man,
who wanted to see the Amazon before he died,
asked, "What's that ugly thing?" (185-187)

## Pink Dog

[Rio de Janeiro]

The sun is blazing and the sky is blue.
Umbrellas clothe the beach in every hue.
Naked, you trot across the avenue.

Oh, never have I seen a dog so bare!
Naked and pink, without a single hair...
Startled, the passersby draw back and stare.

Of course they're mortally afraid of rabies.
You are not mad; you have a case of scabies
but look intelligent. Where are your babies?

(A nursing mother, by those hanging teats.)
In what slum have you hidden them, poor bitch,
while you go begging, living by your wits?

Didn't you know? It's been in all the papers,
to solve this problem, how they deal with beggars?
They take and throw them in the tidal rivers.

Yes, idiots, paralytics, parasites
go bobbing in the ebbing sewage, nights
out in the suburbs, where there are no lights.

If they do this to anyone who begs,
drugged, drunk, or sober, with or without legs,
what would they do to sick, four-legged dogs?

In the cafés and on the sidewalk corners
the joke is going round that all the beggars
who can afford them now wear life preservers.

In your condition you would not be able
even to float, much less to dog-paddle.
Now look, the practical, the sensible

solution is to wear a fantasia.
Tonight you simply can't afford to be a-
n eyesore. But no one will ever see a

dog in máscara this time of year.
Ash Wednesday'll come but Carnival is here.
What sambas can you dance? What will you wear?

They say that Carnival's degenerating
--radios, Americans, or something,
have ruined it completely. They're just talking.

Carnival is always wonderful!
A depilated dog would not look well.
Dress up! Dress up and dance at Carnival! (190-191)